

RESEARCH ARTICLE:

## Dimensional Analysis of Service Fairness on Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction: A Local Municipality Study

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### Abstract

*The recent series of service delivery protests directed at various local municipalities across South Africa, as frequently reported in the media, render it indispensable to examine the underlying association between service fairness, service quality and customer satisfaction within local municipalities in the country. The objective of the study is to investigate the impact of service fairness on service quality and customer satisfaction from the South African local municipal service context. A structured questionnaire elicited data through a convenient sample of 400 rates and taxes payers within three municipal districts in the Vaal Triangle. Descriptive statistics, correlations and regression analysis were used to evaluate relationships between the study constructs. Two of the four predictor variables, namely interactive and informational fairness showed significant predictive relationships towards service quality in municipality services provision among rates and taxes payers. Service quality towards customer satisfaction also emerged as a significant predictor. Municipality managers should embrace customer interaction and participation because customers evaluate the degree of service fairness displayed by the municipal employees and its effects of the service they deliver.*

**Keywords:** service fairness; service quality; customer satisfaction; municipality

### Introduction

Local municipalities are state entities aimed at securing fundamental human rights for citizens to allow a better, reasonably secure normal human social life (Pillay, 2016). They are closest to the people and thus focused on growing local economies and providing infrastructure and basic services to their communities (Kamara, 2017). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) prescribes that all state organs, including local municipalities, are to ensure that the levels of their services delivered to citizens are of uppermost quality (Dzansi and Dzansi, 2010). These municipal services include basic needs such as health services, electricity and gas supply, street lighting, water, refuse removal, roads and storm water drainage, sewerage collection and disposal as well municipal parks and recreation (Boshoff and Mazibuko 2008). While the municipal administrators are focusing on improving their level of service quality, it is important for municipalities to deliver fair and admissible customer service levels (Pretorius and Schurink, 2007). It should, however, be noted that customers measure and judge their actual service encounter, which is influenced by the disproportion between their expectations and perceptions that can render the service provider successful (Daniel and Berinyuy, 2010). Furthermore, quality of service provided by the municipalities to citizens highlights the difference between their success and insufficiencies (Moletsane *et al.*, 2014). Over the past few years, there has been a heightened emphasis on service quality and satisfaction as these constructs are becoming more critical to organisations' bottom lines. These constructs have become of key concern to service providers and accordingly, many of them are devoted to improving the quality of services they offer (Wang *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, examining the association among service fairness, service quality and customer satisfaction is part of the various aspects that must be tested to appreciate the link between these constructs.

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Accordingly, the objective of the study is to investigate the impact of service fairness on service quality and customer satisfaction from the South African local municipal service context. The recent series of service delivery protests in South Africa directed at various local municipalities across South Africa, as frequently reported in the media, render it indispensable to examine the underlying association between service fairness, service quality and customer satisfaction within local municipalities in the country. From a municipality point of view, it is worthy of exploring these constructs in order to predict service fairness within the municipality context, as advocated by Giovanis *et al.* (2015). The authors further acknowledge that investigating service fairness to service programs can benefit researchers and practitioners towards examining the financial value of satisfied customers. While studies on the effects of service fairness on service quality have been carried out in a variety of industries from different settings (Bhatt, 2020), comparatively, there is insufficient indication of empirical studies of service fairness on service quality and satisfaction within municipalities, especially in the South African context. According to the literature review conducted by the researchers, no study attempted to examine service fairness effects on service quality and satisfaction within municipality setting in South Africa except Dzansi *et al.*, (2016) study, which investigated service fairness from the human resources management perspective. It is against this background that the researchers embarked on this study to close the gap in the literature concerning the relationship among the identified constructs. Hence, this study attempted to answer the following basic research questions:

- 1) Which service fairness dimensions have the most influence on service quality?
- 2) What is the current status of service fairness, service quality and customer satisfaction within Emfuleni Municipality?
- 3) Is there any relationship between the identified constructs for the study towards provision of essential services by the Emfuleni Municipality?

The notion of fairness is premised upon the theory of justice, which, in turn, can be traced back to the seminal work of Adams (1963) equity theory (Patterson *et al.*, 2006). Adams equity theory is premised on the notion that human beings place great importance on being treated fairly and equally (Cohen, 1987). Equity evaluation encompasses consumers matching contributions with consequences in relation to a situation (Lacey and Sneath, 2006). In essence, the theory focuses on input and outcome by suggesting that proper balance should be maintained between the two concepts (Bell and Martin, 2012). The concept of 'a fair day's work for a fair day's pay' is well known. Furthermore, the literature within the domain of service marketing suggests that the expectancy disconfirmation theory (EDT) has been most widely used and supported among researchers to underpin service quality and customer satisfaction (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). EDT was advanced as a mode to explain best customer decision-making (Oliver 1997, 1980) and is a cognitive theory, which pursues a better conceptualisation of post-purchase satisfaction as a function of expectations, perceived performance and disconfirmation of beliefs (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). EDT further postulates that customers purchase goods and services with beforehand expectations about the product/service performance (Yüksel and Yüksel, 2008). The expectation then becomes a basis or standard against which the product or service is judged by the customers.

### Definition of Key Concepts

For a study of this nature where certain terminologies are discipline-related, it is essential to discuss some key concepts in order to ensure clarity and understanding. Thus, the following concepts are discussed to provide detailed explanations.

**Service fairness:** Considering that service fairness is advanced by many researchers from different contexts and described using various dimensions, the current study follows the perspective proposed by Bhatt (2020) and considers service fairness as a higher order construct made of four different fairness dimensions, namely distributive, procedural, informational and interactional. Traditionally, these are the four dimensions of service fairness that has been identified (Lind and Tyler, 1988). For this study, service fairness is defined as a customer's perception of the degree of justice in a service firm's behaviour (Seiders and Berry, 1998) in those perceptions of unfairness lead to dissatisfaction while perceptions of fairness result in positive emotions and satisfaction (Szymanski and Henard, 2001).

**Procedural fairness:** Procedural fairness relates to rules and formal processes and the degree to which they are perceived to have been followed (Clarke *et al.*, 2013). In other words, perceived fairness relates to the means used to achieve an end (Niehoff and Moorman, 1993). According to Brockner and Wiesenfeld (1996), this concept is based on whether the processes employed to denote the outcome are consistent and represent the interest of all concerned parties; in other words, appropriateness of the allocation process (Allameh and Rostami, 2014). Furthermore, it is premised on the notion that fair procedures are consistent, unbiased, impartial, respect all parties' interests and are based on accurate information and ethical standards (Leventhal *et al.*, 1980). Therefore, to uphold long-term exchange relationships between the partners, the significance of procedural fairness should not be overlooked.

**Distributive fairness:** Distributive fairness is defined as how the service delivery outcomes are equally dispensed (Kandul, 2016) and refers to the perceived fairness of the physical outcome of a decision involving two or more parties (Blodgett *et al.*, 1997). It further involves customer cognitive, affective, and behavioural reactions to the outcomes (Hassan, 2013) as a result of core service quality evaluation (Ting, 2011). Therefore, distributive fairness, within a service delivery context, includes quantity of service, beliefs of cost, accuracy and superiority of the product and service delivered (Bowen *et al.*, 1999). Within the context of this study, it can be inferred from these assertions that when a customer perceives that a given outcome is unfair, his behaviour and emotions will be commensurate with their inputs (Sindhav *et al.*, 2006). With specific reference to distributive fairness, the end no longer justifies the means. Thus, service providers should work on providing a consistent, reasonable, and bias-free procedure to create fair perceptions of services provided (quality and satisfaction levels).

**Informational fairness:** According to Lacey and Sneath (2006), customers assess how procedures are applied and how the process and results are clarified. Therefore, customer perceptions of fairness are not necessarily built on perceived service variances, but likewise on the information received (Jung *et al.*, 2017). Informational fairness focuses on clarifications given to individuals about why certain procedures or strategies were followed to obtain the outcome (Hadi and Supardi, 2020). Greenberg (1993) defines information fairness as providing or conveying information that explains outcomes and procedures to customers appropriately and fairly, in other words, the degree to which employees receive an explanation for the decisions made by the organisation and its agents. Accordingly, information fairness implicates customers' perception about adequate (clear, reasonable, and appropriately detailed), rational and sensible messages from the organisation's service personnel to customers (Sindhav *et al.*, 2006). This facet of fairness emphasises the role of social accounts in fairness evaluations (Bies, 1987) and serves as a signal to customers that they are worthy of dignity and respect (Bies and Moag, 1986).

**Interactional fairness:** Interactional fairness is in fact an extension of procedural fairness that explains the social traits of the relationship (Qin Su, Huang, Wiersma and Liu, 2019) and the modern addition in the fairness literature (Karkoulian *et al.*, 2016). The crux of interactional fairness is the interpersonal relationships between service personnel and customers in a service delivery process (Nikbin *et al.*, 2010). Interactional fairness represents an interpersonal aspect of fairness during the enactment of the decision-making process/procedure (Bies, 2005) as it refers to the extent and quality of the two-way movement between provider and customer (Schermerhorn, 2009). This proposes that interactional fairness is an outcome of interaction quality between the consumer and the service personnel. Interactional justice is characterised by explanations and treatment of people with integrity and consideration to explain the fairness of procedures and results (Ogbuabor and Onodugo, 2020) and thus requires a resolute exertion to offer all customers polite and personal attention (Greenberg, 1993). Numerous studies confirm that a relationship between service fairness and service quality does exist from different settings (Su *et al.*, 2016; Giovanis *et al.*, 2015; Fu, 2013; and Chen *et al.*, 2012). Based on the theories related to service fairness and service quality, the researchers posit the following hypotheses:

- H1 Procedural fairness has a significant influence on customer satisfaction.
- H2 Distributive fairness has a significant influence on customer satisfaction.
- H3 Informational fairness has a significant influence on customer satisfaction.
- H4 Interactional fairness has a significant influence on customer satisfaction.

**Service quality and customer satisfaction:** Service quality has extended its eminence for both marketing researchers and practitioners alike in determining service provider's success in today's competitive environment (Brady *et al.*, 2005) and is a critical determinant of service delivery evaluation by customers (Ghasemi *et al.*, 2012). The service quality concept is grounded in the expectancy-disconfirmation theory (Gronroos, 1982, Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985), which validates the idea that quality is an outcome of comparing perceived with expected performance (Olson and Dover, 1979). Service quality, as proposed in the literature, is the outcome of an assessment between what is performed and what was expected from a service provider (Parasuraman and Zeithaml, 2002). In fact, Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) emphasise that service quality fundamentally comprises perceived quality – meaning, how the quality of the service is experienced. Like many constructs, in consumer behaviour research, customer satisfaction has been conceptualised and measured in various ways. The basis of customer satisfaction is explaining the expressive post-consumption outcome resulting from a fair and fulfilling encounter (Prayag *et al.*, 2017; and Huang *et al.*, 2015). As such, customer satisfaction is related to a fair and satisfying customer service experience that predicts positive correlation between service fairness and satisfaction (Zhu and Chen, 2012). For example, municipal rates and taxes payers' satisfaction is a key variable in assessing the success of the public service system. Academic discussions on the topic have been fervent and there is still ongoing debate on whether this concept should be regarded as a transaction-specific concept or as a cumulative concept. From a cumulative perspective, customer satisfaction refers to an inclusive judgement by customers relating to their purchase experience and consumption of products and services rendered by service providers over time (Khadka and Maharjan, 2017). The extant literature affirms perceived service quality as the ultimate and influential predictor of customer satisfaction (Santouridis *et al.*, 2009) through its direct impact on customer satisfaction (Getahun, 2019). Therefore, arising from the foregoing discussion, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5 Service quality has a significant influence on customer satisfaction.

## Methodology

The study made use of a cross-sectional descriptive quantitative research design. A non-probability sampling technique was adopted to seek information from a conveniently selected sample of 400 targeted study participants drawn from the Sedibeng District Municipality area in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Data were collected from the municipal rates and taxes payers using a structured self-administered questionnaire. To randomise the data collection procedure, the survey was conducted by the researchers on different days and times of the week to eliminate day- and time-related bias. Informed consent of the participants was observed through an accompanying letter to the questionnaire, which acknowledged the purpose, nature, and legitimacy of the study. Voluntary participation was encouraged, and the respondents were also assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses in the informed consent form. The on-site administration of the main survey resulted in a total of 400 questionnaires being distributed, out of which 341 usable questionnaires (representing a response rate of approximately 85%) were retrieved for the final analysis.

The questionnaire adopted in this study was designed using established scales for all the study constructs. All items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale that was anchored at 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree in order to express the degree of agreement/disagreement. The four sub-dimensions of service fairness were measured using the scales provided by Chen *et al.* (2012) and Carr (2007), while eight items used to measure service quality were based on the work of Bhatt (2020). Finally, the four items used to measure customer satisfaction were derived from the scales used by Gumussoy and Koseoglu (2016). In addition, the measuring instrument contained a separate section, which elicited respondents' biographical information. The adequateness and appropriateness of the measuring instrument items were validated through conducting a focus group interview of rates and taxes payers who were excluded from the main survey. First, the frequency analysis was used in the respondent's demography study. Secondly, the descriptive and correlation analysis were operated in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 26.0, to analyse data. Finally, as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), a two-stage procedure (CFA and SEM) was undertaken to model the hypothesised causal relationship between the research variables in the conceptual model using AMOS 26.0.

The sample included slightly more males (n=171; 50,1%) than females (n=170; 49,9%). The largest components of the sample were those who were between 35-40 years of age (n=156;45.7%), followed by those who were between 41-45 years of age (n=124;36.3%), those who were between 25-30 years of age (n=41;12.3%), those who were over 45 years of age (n=16;4.6%) and the least being those below 25 years of age (n=4;1.1%). Most of the respondents (n=241;70.6%) indicated a period of residence within the municipality area of more than 10 years, followed by (n=60;17.6%) respondents who resided within the municipality for a period of between five and ten years, while the rest of the respondents (n=40;11.8%) recorded a residence period of less than five years.

Internal consistency reliability was met in terms of both the reported Cronbach's coefficient alpha (ranging between 0.62 and 0.92) and the composite reliability (CR) values above 0.6 threshold (ranging between 0.61 and 0.98). These reliability values are considered acceptable indices (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), which also suggest that all the items in the scale tap into the same underlying constructs (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). Various forms of validity were used in the study. First, content validity was ascertained through the recorded AVE values being more than the recommended 0.5, suggesting that more than 50 percent of each item's variance was shared with its respective construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table 1 shows that all the square root values of AVE are greater than the actual AVE values for all the research constructs, thereby confirming the existence of discriminant validity (Hair *et al.*, 2006). In addition, the correlations coefficients (<0.85 cut-off) reported in Table 1 provide further evidence that the measurements used in the study demonstrate sufficient discriminant validity (Chin, 1998). Based on both CR and Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability values ( $\geq 0.60$  cut-off), it can be concluded that the measurements used in the study demonstrate sufficient convergent validity. Furthermore, the outer loadings of all constructs are higher than 0.60 and are statistically significant, exhibiting sufficient convergent validity (Golafshani, 2003). Finally, the predictive validity assessment was operationalised through the SEM modelling procedure, which tested the hypothesised causal relationship between the research variables in the structural model (Pallant, 2001). The study's reliability and validity analysis are done below in Table 1:

**Table 1:** Psychometric properties of the scale items

Research construct		Reliability tests			Validity tests		
		Item-total	Cronbach $\alpha$ Value	CR	AVE	Square root of AVE	Outer loadings
Distributive (DIS)	DIS <sub>1</sub>	.405	0.68	0.69	0.47	0.71	.480
	DIS <sub>2</sub>	.590					.868
	DIS <sub>3</sub>	.566					.831
Procedural (PCD)	PCD <sub>1</sub>	.434	0.67	0.67	0.46	0.707	.832
	PCD <sub>2</sub>	.489					.810
	PCD <sub>3</sub>	.499					.474
	PCD <sub>4</sub>	.415					.461
Informativeness (IF)	IF <sub>1</sub>	.769	0.92	0.93	0.76	0.77	.813
	IF <sub>2</sub>	.865					.908
	IF <sub>3</sub>	.855					.911
	IF <sub>4</sub>	.787					.830
Interactional (IT)	IT <sub>1</sub>	.434	0.66	0.66	0.46	0.56	.686
	IT <sub>2</sub>	.448					.464
	IT <sub>3</sub>	.414					.483
	IT <sub>4</sub>	.404					.416
Service quality (SQ)	SQ <sub>1</sub>	.908	0.92	0.95	0.86	0.78	.914
	SQ <sub>2</sub>	.931					.939
	SQ <sub>3</sub>	.900					.912
	SQ <sub>4</sub>	.923					.933
	SQ <sub>5</sub>	.918					.929
	SQ <sub>6</sub>	.926					.936
	SQ <sub>7</sub>	.927					.938

	SQ <sub>8</sub>	.927					.937
Satisfaction (SAT)	SAT <sub>1</sub>	.453	0.84	0.80	0.47	0.79	.462
	SAT <sub>2</sub>	.833					.717
	SAT <sub>3</sub>	.839					.745
	SAT <sub>4</sub>	.698					.897
		≥0.30	≥0.70	≥0.70	≥0.50	≥0.50	≥0.50

Note: C.R = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted; Factor loadings computed through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) approach using AMOS (26.0). Descriptive and reliability values (Cronbach  $\alpha$ ) values were computed using SPSS (version 26.0)

The results of the correlation analysis as well as the descriptive statistics are illustrated in Table 2 below.

**Table 2:** Correlations between constructs and descriptive statistics

FACTORS	DIS	PCD	IP	IF	SQ	SAT	MEANS	SD
DIS	1	.738**	.392**	.334**	.385**	.236**	4.108	.719
PCD	.738**	1	.375**	.358**	.376**	.280**	4.1346	.603
IP	.392**	.375**	1	.540**	.581**	.470**	3.7967	.697
IF	.334**	.358**	.540**	1	.735**	.803**	2.3538	1.172
SQ	.385**	.376**	.581**	.735**	1	.820**	2.3390	1.335
SAT	.263**	.280**	.470**	.803**	.820**	1	2.9961	1.151

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The results in Table 1 indicate weak ( $r=.263$ ) to strong positive ( $r=.820$ ) correlation relationships among the constructs under investigation at  $p < 0.01$ , thus providing evidence of acceptable discriminant validity among the constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). With respect to descriptive statistics, Table 2 indicates that all mean scores returned for all the constructs under investigation were all above the score of two on the Likert scale. The recorded means suggest that the respondents recognise the significance of these constructs within the municipal context. In addition, the standard deviations are very similar across the constructs, relative to the means.

The measurement model assessment preceded the structural model assessment, which tested the hypothesised causal relationship between the research variables in the structural model. The good fitness of the data was supported by  $\chi^2=1.911$  ( $\chi^2 < 3.0$ ). If the more suitable goodness-of-fit indices recommended by Hu and Bentler (1999) are applied, the model is well within acceptable parameters (CMIN/DF =  $584.775/306 = 1.911$  ( $< 3.0$ ))  $P=0$ , goodness of fit index = 0.913 (GoFI > 0.90), normed fit index = 0.954 (NFI > 0.90), comparative fit index = 0.978 (CFI > 0.90), increment fit index = 0.978 (IFI > 0.90), relative fit index = 0.948 (RFI > 0.90), Tucker-Lewis index = 0.974 (TLI > 0.90) and the root mean square error of approximation = 0.045 (RMSEA < 0.08).

Having established a reliable and valid measurement model, a structural model was performed to test the predictive relationships between the study constructs. Figure 1 and Table 3 present the current study's results of the SEM analysis.

**Table 3:** Results of SEM analysis

Path	Hypothesis	Path coefficients estimate B	SE	CR (t values)	P	Decision
DISF → SQ	H1	0.035	0.132	0.266	0.79	Not Supported
PRDF → SQ	H2	0.039	0.15	0.262	0.793	Not Supported
INTP → SQ	H3	0.384	0.091	4.208	***	Supported
INF → SQ	H4	0.746	0.048	15.607	***	Supported
SQ → SAT	H5	0.791	0.042	18.944	***	Supported

SE= Standard Error CR= Critical value P= Probability value

Note 1\*\*\* p-value 0.01; Using a significance level of 0.05 critical ratios (t-value) that exceed 1.96 would be called significant.

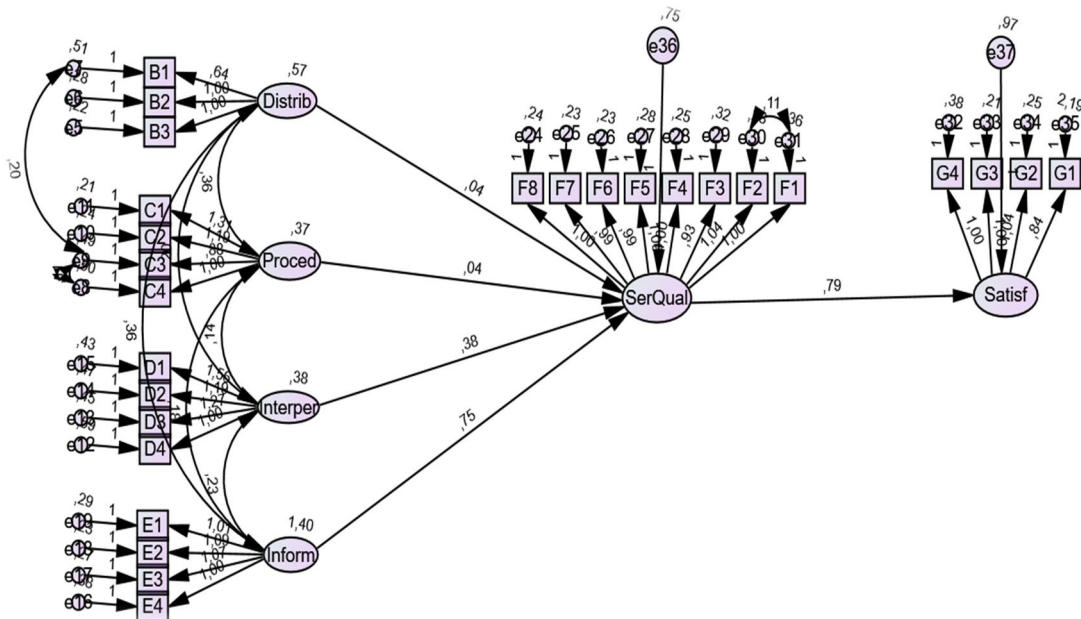


Figure 1: Results of SEM path model

## Discussion of Results

As indicated in Table 3 and Figure 1, both distributive fairness standard coefficients ( $\beta=0.035$ ,  $t=0.266$ ;  $p<0.79$ ) and procedural fairness ( $\beta=0.039$ ,  $t=0.262$ ;  $p<0.793$ ) posed the weakest and insignificant direct influence over service quality in respect of municipality services. In this study, both dimensions were insignificant contributors to service quality within the Emfuleni Municipality services. Therefore, hypothesis 1 and hypothesis 2 were not supported. In terms of correlations, distributive fairness was strongly correlated to service quality as well as procedural fairness to service quality with significant Pearson's coefficient of 0.385 and 0.376 at 0.05 level respectively (see Table 2). The study's findings on distributive fairness are consistent with Lowe and Vodanovich's (1995) view that the relative significance of distributive evaluations varies over time and in relation to external events. With respect to procedural fairness, the procedures involved in accessing different municipality services (water, electricity, and sanitation) influence rates and taxes payers' perception of fairness and subsequently their service quality evaluation.

However, the standard coefficients of interpersonal fairness and service quality ( $\beta=0.384$ ,  $t=4.208$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) as well as information fairness and service quality ( $\beta=0.746$ ,  $t=15.607$ ;  $p<0.01$ ), were positive and significant, thereby confirming acceptance of hypotheses 3 and 4 respectively. Significant correlations coefficients were reported in Table 2 to support this finding (Pearson's coefficient of 0.385 between IF and SQ and 0.735 between INT and SQ 0.581). As per these results reported, information fairness is the most important determinant of service quality. This supports the notion that providing timely and specific information to customers makes the consumption experience more exciting, thus leading to a favourable perception of the service quality level. Furthermore, when municipalities display consideration and honesty during their interactions with customers, it results in positive feelings and behaviours/emotions (Dai and Xie, 2016), which subsequently leads to favourable perceptions of service quality levels. This suggests that employing informational justice principles and honest interactions with customers is an effective strategy to mitigate negative reactions (Greenberg and Lind, 2000), in other words, a key to securing favourable customer's perceptions towards service quality. Finally, the standard coefficients of service quality and customer satisfaction ( $\beta=0.791$ ,  $t=18.944$ ;  $p<0.01$ ) support the acceptance of hypothesis 5. These results are in line with the findings of previous studies of Mokhlis *et al.* (2011) as well as Gobena, (2019) on the same constructs within the municipality context. The authors further identify the two constructs as critical to researchers who are studying consumer evaluations.

It is worth noting at this juncture that municipalities must embrace customer interaction and participation because customers evaluate the degree of service fairness displayed by the municipal employees and its effects of the service they deliver. The mandate in this regard requires public officials to consult the public, among others, providing them with a right to be heard on issues of public concern. Public participation in municipality administration allows the public the opportunity to participate in the making of decisions that affect them as an informed community, particularly providing a platform for marginalised communities to air their concerns alongside the more affluent sectors of society. With regards to assessing the effectiveness of existing practices to manage unfairness perceptions, managers can use informational justice principles as an effective strategy to counter negative reactions towards organisational decisions. Interactions open areas for further business and contribute to the long-term success and survival of an organisation by influencing the consumer's perception and evaluation. This could be fostered through communication that allows both consumers and service providers to feel each other's pulses. Finally, this study may be one of the pioneers to integrate all four dimensions of service fairness within the municipality services literature in respect of service quality and customer satisfaction constructs, which have become more critical to organisations' bottom lines.

Given the scope of the study and inadequate access to resources, the study sample was limited to rates and taxes payers of only one district municipality within Gauteng province in South Africa. Even though demographic questions were included in the questionnaire to judge how representative the sample was to the target population, the results should be observed cautiously when generalising and drawing conclusions to a broader population. It is suggested that future research be expanded to include more municipality boundaries throughout South Africa. The implications of sampling error should also be noted due to the non-probability convenience sampling nature of the study. Additionally, it is possible that the study was disposed to social benefit bias, related to the rates and taxes payers' tendency of altering their responses based on what is alleged to be accurate by either the researchers or society. Future studies may consider employing a mixed method approach, incorporating questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews to enable the researcher to probe and triangulate the results. The cross-sectional nature of the study could be mitigated by replication of the study using a longitudinal design with repeated measures.

## Conclusion

On one end, using the perspective of equity and justice theories, the study proposed and examined the effect of service fairness on service quality. From the results, it can be observed that despite the insignificance of procedural and distributive fairness, interactional and interpersonal fairness in municipality services has positive effects on service quality level evaluations by rates and taxes payers. The results, furthermore, highlight the fact that informational and interactional fairness can also be stimuli for equity and justice, whereas most past researchers considered distributive and procedural fairness as key resources in this domain. On the other end, the study adopted the perspective of DCT theory to propose and examine the effect of service quality on customer satisfaction. This study concentrated on the effects of service quality on customer satisfaction and identified service quality to be related to customer satisfaction in line with multiple previous research in this context.

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