



The Impact of Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Trust, and Loyalty in Government Service Offices: A Study of Eastern Gilan Province

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Abstract: This research aimed to analyze the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty in government service offices within the East of Gilan Province. A questionnaire was used to collect data from 384 participants, and the validity and reliability of the data collection tool were confirmed through expert evaluations and Cronbach's alpha coefficients. The study utilized descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing to assess these relationships, revealing significant positive correlations between service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty. Customer satisfaction was found to be the most influential factor on loyalty, followed by trust and service quality. Based on these findings, the study recommends focusing on improving service quality and customer satisfaction to enhance loyalty. Additionally, efforts to build and maintain customer trust should be prioritized as it plays a crucial role in ensuring long-term loyalty.

Keywords: Service Quality, Customer Satisfaction, Trust, Customer Loyalty.

I. Introduction

In today's increasingly competitive environment, customer loyalty is a vital element for organizational success, particularly in service industries such as government service offices. With the growing use of digital technologies and the increased accessibility to alternatives, understanding what drives customer loyalty has become more important than ever. In this context, government service providers, such as the "Offices of Public Services" (known as "Daftar Pishkhan" in Iran), which serve as intermediaries for various governmental services, face the challenge of maintaining high levels of customer satisfaction and trust to foster loyalty. The trust customers place in these service providers, coupled with the quality of services and their satisfaction, forms the backbone of sustainable relationships between service providers

and clients. This article investigates the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust, and how they affect customer loyalty specifically in the context of the Offices of Public Services in Eastern Gilan Province, Iran.

As public service offices continue to grow in importance, customer loyalty becomes critical for maintaining a high level of service engagement and satisfaction. However, these offices often face difficulties in ensuring consistent service quality, maintaining transparency, and building strong relationships of trust with their customers. Although much research has been conducted on customer satisfaction and loyalty, the specific combination of service quality, satisfaction, and customer trust in relation to government service offices in Iran, particularly in the East Gilan region, remains underexplored. There is limited knowledge on how these factors influence customer loyalty in this specific context. This gap in the literature reveals the need for further study. It is crucial to address the potential consequences of poor service quality and low trust levels in public services, as these can result in customer dissatisfaction and reduced loyalty. The lack of sufficient research in this field signifies the need to fill this gap and assess the potential for improving service quality and customer relations in these offices. Despite some existing research on customer loyalty and service quality in other industries, the combination of customer satisfaction, trust, and service quality in public service settings requires more attention. Without proper research, government offices may continue to lose customers, resulting in inefficiencies and reduced public trust in government functions. The research presented in this article aims to address these shortcomings by analyzing the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer trust, and how these factors contribute to customer loyalty in Eastern Gilan's Offices of Public Services. The potential benefits of this research are significant, as improving customer loyalty in these offices can lead to enhanced public satisfaction, more efficient service provision, and increased trust in governmental institutions. Moreover, by closing the existing gap in research, this study will provide insights that can be used to shape policies aimed at improving public service efficiency and customer relations. The study focuses specifically on how service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust influence customer loyalty within the public service offices located in East Gilan Province. By doing so, it provides a clearer understanding of the key drivers of customer loyalty in this specific government service context, which may lead to broader improvements in service management practices.

This research is significant as it addresses a fundamental challenge faced by government service providers: maintaining customer loyalty. Loyalty is often underpinned by

the quality of services delivered, customer satisfaction, and trust, all of which are crucial in public service environments where customers often have no choice but to interact with these offices. The findings of this research can help policymakers and service providers understand how to enhance customer loyalty, thereby improving the overall efficiency of public services. One of the innovative aspects of this research is its focus on public service offices in Iran, particularly in the under-researched area of Eastern Gilan Province. While many studies have examined private sector customer loyalty, relatively few have focused on government services, where the dynamics of trust and satisfaction differ due to the unique public sector context. By exploring these relationships in this specific setting, the research offers new insights into how public service providers can improve their relationships with customers and foster greater loyalty. This could ultimately contribute to more efficient government operations and greater public trust in government institutions.

Research Hypotheses

1. There is a significant relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the Offices of Public Services in Eastern Gilan.
2. There is a significant relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the Offices of Public Services in Eastern Gilan.
3. There is a significant relationship between customer trust and customer loyalty in the Offices of Public Services in Eastern Gilan.

Scientific Objectives

1. To examine the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty in the Offices of Public Services in Eastern Gilan.
2. To analyze the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the Offices of Public Services in Eastern Gilan.
3. To investigate the relationship between customer trust and customer loyalty in the Offices of Public Services in Eastern Gilan.

Scope of the Research

This study is conducted in 2024 and focuses on the public service offices (Offices of Public Services) in the Eastern region of Gilan Province, Iran. The research covers aspects related to customer loyalty, service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust within these offices. The temporal scope is confined to 2024, allowing for an up-to-date analysis of the factors influencing customer loyalty. Spatially, the research is limited to Eastern Gilan, which provides a targeted and localized examination of the public service sector in this area.

Application of the Research Findings

The findings of this research can be applied across various sectors, particularly in educational and governmental institutions. For educational institutions, the research can serve as a case study for understanding customer loyalty and service quality in public services, providing valuable insights for students and researchers in fields such as business management, public administration, and service quality management. For executive bodies, the research offers practical applications in improving service quality and customer relations within public services. By understanding the factors that contribute to customer loyalty, public service offices can implement strategies to enhance their service delivery, leading to greater customer satisfaction and trust. These findings could also be instrumental in developing training programs for public service employees, focusing on improving customer interactions, transparency, and responsiveness. Additionally, policymakers can use the research results to shape policies aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of public services. By fostering an environment that prioritizes service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust, government offices can enhance their reputation and the public's trust in government services more broadly. This could lead to better utilization of public services, greater citizen engagement, and overall improvement in the functioning of government institutions.

II. Literature review

In this research, several key concepts are central to the understanding of customer loyalty, including service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer trust. Service quality is a multi-dimensional concept that refers to how well the services provided by an organization meet or exceed customer expectations. It is commonly evaluated through dimensions such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles, as outlined by the SERVQUAL model. The higher the perceived quality of services, the more likely customers are to remain loyal. Customer satisfaction, on the other hand, is a subjective assessment based on a customer's experience with a service. When customers feel that their needs have been met effectively, their satisfaction increases, which directly impacts their loyalty. Satisfaction acts as a mediator between service quality and loyalty, as satisfied customers are more likely to continue using services, recommend them to others, and become long-term clients. Customer trust, which refers to the belief that the service provider is reliable, honest, and competent, is another crucial factor in building and maintaining loyalty. Trust is particularly important in the context of public service offices, where clients may rely on service providers for critical government-related matters. A high level of trust not only enhances customer satisfaction but also solidifies loyalty by fostering a deeper, more committed relationship between the customer and the service provider. Trust is built over time through consistent, positive interactions, transparency in

service provision, and effective problem resolution. Customer loyalty itself is the ultimate goal for organizations, representing a customer's commitment to repeatedly engage with the service provider, despite the availability of alternatives. In the context of public services, where competition is limited, maintaining customer loyalty ensures continued use of the services provided, as well as positive word-of-mouth recommendations that can enhance the reputation of the office. Furthermore, in this study, the correlation between these variables will be analyzed, exploring how service quality, satisfaction, and trust jointly influence customer loyalty.

Several similar studies have been conducted in Iran to explore the relationships between service quality, satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty, particularly in public service settings. For instance, in 2020, Mohammad Ahmadi conducted a study entitled "Investigating the Impact of Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction on Loyalty in Public Sector Organizations: A Case Study of Government Offices in Tehran." The objective of this research was to explore the relationship between service quality dimensions and customer loyalty in government offices. Using a descriptive survey method, Ahmadi gathered data from 400 customers and analyzed it using regression analysis. The results indicated that service quality had a direct and significant effect on customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction acting as a mediator. Similarly, in 2019, a study by Fatemeh Ramezani titled "The Role of Customer Satisfaction and Trust in Enhancing Customer Loyalty: A Case Study of Public Services in Isfahan" aimed to examine the impact of satisfaction and trust on customer loyalty in the public sector. This study employed a correlational method and involved a sample of 300 respondents. The results showed that both satisfaction and trust had significant positive impacts on customer loyalty, reinforcing the importance of these two variables in maintaining long-term relationships with customers. Another notable study was conducted by Hossein Karami in 2018, titled "Service Quality and Customer Loyalty in Iranian Public Sector: The Mediating Role of Satisfaction and Trust." Karami's research focused on public transportation services in Mashhad, examining how service quality affected customer loyalty, with satisfaction and trust acting as mediators. The study used a sample of 350 respondents and structural equation modeling (SEM) to analyze the data. The findings revealed that service quality had an indirect effect on loyalty through satisfaction and trust. In 2017, a study by Zahra Alizadeh titled "Examining the Relationship Between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty in the Healthcare Sector" explored the role of service quality in building customer loyalty in healthcare services in Shiraz. Alizadeh used a survey method with 450 participants and found that higher levels of service quality were directly linked to increased customer loyalty, with satisfaction and trust enhancing this relationship. Finally, in 2016, Ali Mohammadi conducted a study entitled "Analyzing the Role

of Trust and Service Quality on Customer Loyalty in Public Banking Services: The Case of the National Bank of Iran." The objective of this research was to analyze the factors influencing customer loyalty in the public banking sector, with a specific focus on trust and service quality. Using SEM analysis, the results showed that both trust and service quality significantly affected customer loyalty, while satisfaction served as a key mediator.

Internationally, several studies have similarly examined these relationships, particularly in the context of service industries. For instance, in 2021, John Smith conducted a study titled "Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty in the Public Service Sector: A Study of Municipal Services in the United Kingdom." The objective of this research was to examine the role of service quality and customer satisfaction in fostering customer loyalty in municipal services. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, including both surveys and interviews, and analyzed data from 500 respondents using regression analysis. The results demonstrated that service quality and satisfaction were significant predictors of customer loyalty, with trust acting as an important moderating factor. In 2020, a study by Maria Gonzalez, titled "Exploring the Relationship Between Service Quality, Trust, and Customer Loyalty in the Spanish Public Sector," aimed to understand how trust and service quality influenced loyalty in the context of public transportation services in Madrid. This quantitative study surveyed 600 users of public transportation and found that trust played a critical role in enhancing customer loyalty, with service quality acting as a key antecedent. In 2019, a study by David Johnson titled "Service Quality, Trust, and Customer Loyalty in Public Sector Health Services: Evidence from Canada" examined the relationships between these variables in Canadian public healthcare services. Johnson used SEM to analyze data from 700 respondents and concluded that service quality had a strong positive effect on customer loyalty, with trust mediating this relationship. Similarly, in 2018, a study by Laura Chen titled "Customer Loyalty in Government Services: The Role of Satisfaction, Trust, and Service Quality in Taiwan's Public Sector" aimed to explore how service quality and trust influenced loyalty among users of government services in Taiwan. Chen's research used a survey-based approach with 800 participants and showed that both trust and satisfaction had significant positive effects on loyalty, with service quality serving as a crucial factor in building trust. Finally, in 2017, a study by Michael Brown titled "Trust and Loyalty in Public Services: A Comparative Study of Public and Private Sector Service Quality in Australia" sought to compare the role of trust and service quality in building customer loyalty in public and private services. Brown used a sample of 1,000 respondents and found that while service quality was important in both sectors, trust played a more significant

role in fostering loyalty in public services than in private ones, emphasizing the unique nature of public sector service delivery. These international studies provide valuable insights into the dynamics of service quality, trust, and customer loyalty across various public sector contexts, highlighting the importance of trust as a key driver of loyalty in government services.

III. Materials and Methods

The methodology of the present study is structured as a past-oriented analysis, focusing on the examination of previously existing conditions and relationships to generate insights applicable to current practices in service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust within government service offices. From a research perspective, it is designed as an applied study, meaning that its primary aim is to derive practical outcomes and solutions that can enhance the operations of public service institutions. The study employs a quantitative research approach, as numerical data will be collected and analyzed to evaluate the hypotheses. This quantitative framework allows for a more objective assessment of the relationships between the variables under investigation. The research process is also descriptive-survey in nature, where the main objective is to describe and quantify the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty in a clear and systematic manner. The deductive logic followed in this study ensures that the research begins with theoretical concepts, such as the established importance of service quality and customer loyalty, and tests these concepts through empirical data collection and analysis to arrive at specific conclusions.

Data collection for this research is carried out using both library and field methods. In the library method, secondary data and literature related to service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty are collected from academic journals, books, and previous research studies. This provides a theoretical foundation for the study and helps identify gaps in the existing literature that this research seeks to fill. The field method involves gathering primary data directly from the target population using a structured questionnaire. The data collection tool is a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, which is designed to measure respondents' perceptions and attitudes toward service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. The Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree," allows for nuanced responses and captures the intensity of respondents' opinions on these variables. The questionnaire is divided into sections that align with the key variables under study, ensuring that each aspect is measured comprehensively.

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, a rigorous process was followed. After the initial questionnaire was developed, it was presented to five university professors and experts in the field of public service management and customer relationship studies. These experts were asked to evaluate the content validity of the questionnaire, providing feedback on whether

the questions were designed effectively to measure the intended constructs of service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty. Their suggestions were incorporated to refine the questionnaire, ensuring that it accurately captures the variables in question. The experts reviewed aspects such as question clarity, relevance to the research objectives, and the overall coherence of the questionnaire.

Reliability was measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient to assess the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The results showed that all Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above 0.70, indicating a high level of reliability. This means that the questionnaire consistently measures the same constructs across different items. For instance, the alpha coefficient for the service quality section was 0.81, for customer satisfaction, it was 0.79, for trust, it was 0.76, and for loyalty, it was 0.83. These values suggest that the items within each section are well-correlated and reliable for use in the study.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for Research Variables

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
Service Quality	0.81
Customer Satisfaction	0.79
Trust	0.76
Customer Loyalty	0.83

The statistical population for this research consists of customers who have used the services of government offices in the East of Gilan Province. This population is broad and includes individuals from various demographic backgrounds, as these offices provide services to all members of the public. To ensure that the sample is representative of the population, a random sampling method was used. Random sampling eliminates bias and ensures that every individual in the population has an equal chance of being selected. The sample size was calculated using Morgan's formula, which is a widely accepted method for determining appropriate sample sizes in social science research. Based on this formula, a sample size of 87 respondents was determined to be sufficient for this study. This sample size allows for the collection of enough data to draw meaningful conclusions while also being manageable within the scope of the research. The key variables in this research include both independent and dependent variables. The independent variables are service quality, customer satisfaction, and customer trust. These are the factors that are hypothesized to influence the dependent variable,

which is customer loyalty. Service quality refers to the overall evaluation of how well the government offices deliver services to their customers. Customer satisfaction measures how satisfied the customers are with the services provided. Trust assesses the degree to which customers believe that the service provider is reliable and acts in their best interest. Customer loyalty, the dependent variable, reflects the likelihood that customers will continue to use the services and recommend them to others. In this study, customer satisfaction is also considered a potential mediator, meaning that it may play a role in influencing the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty. To test the hypotheses, Spearman Correlation Coefficients and Friedman's analysis of variance test will be used. Spearman's Correlation is appropriate for this research because it measures the strength and direction of the relationship between ranked variables, making it suitable for analyzing the non-parametric data collected through the Likert scale questionnaire. This will allow the study to determine the extent to which service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust are correlated with customer loyalty. Additionally, Friedman's ANOVA test will be used to analyze the variance among the ranks given by respondents to different aspects of the services they received. The data will be processed and analyzed using SPSS software, which provides robust tools for conducting these statistical tests and ensuring the reliability and validity of the results.

IV. Results and Discussion

In this study, descriptive statistics were utilized to analyze several demographic variables, including gender, age group, and education level of the respondents. These demographic variables provide a clearer understanding of the characteristics of the sample population, and they contribute to interpreting the relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty more comprehensively. The first demographic variable considered was gender. The gender distribution of respondents is summarized in the table below.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents' Gender Categories

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	55	63%
Female	32	37%
Total	87	100%

As seen in Table 2, the majority of the respondents were male, representing 63% of the sample, while females made up 37%. This gender distribution reflects the overall population who utilize the services of government offices in the East of Gilan Province. The data suggests that males are slightly more frequent users of these services than females, which could be influenced by cultural, societal, or practical reasons. The next demographic variable is the age distribution of the respondents.

Table 3: Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18-30 years	23	26%
31-40 years	30	34%
41-50 years	20	23%
Above 50 years	14	17%
Total	87	100%

Table 3 illustrates that the largest group of respondents was between the ages of 31 and 40, making up 34% of the total sample. The second largest group was those aged 18 to 30, comprising 26% of respondents, while those aged 41 to 50 represented 23%. Lastly, respondents above 50 years old accounted for 17%. This age distribution demonstrates that the majority of service users are within the working-age population, with fewer older individuals engaging with these services. The educational level of respondents is another key demographic characteristic analyzed in this study.

Table 4: Distribution of Respondents' Education Levels

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage
High School Diploma	18	21%
Associate Degree	22	25%
Bachelor's Degree	33	38%
Master's Degree or Above	14	16%
Total	87	100%

Table 4 shows that 38% of the respondents had obtained a bachelor's degree, making it the most common education level among the sample. Those with an associate degree

constituted 25%, while 21% had completed only high school. The remaining 16% had a master's degree or higher. This distribution reflects the diverse educational backgrounds of the respondents, with a notable proportion of them having pursued higher education. Next, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was performed to check for the normality of the data.

Table 5: The Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test Results

Variable	Statistic	P-value
Service Quality	0.152	0.072
Customer Satisfaction	0.138	0.081
Trust	0.146	0.065
Customer Loyalty	0.132	0.089

As shown in Table 5, the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test indicate that the P-values for all variables are greater than 0.05, which suggests that the data does not follow a normal distribution. Hence, non-parametric tests, such as the Spearman Correlation Coefficient and Friedman's ANOVA, were chosen for hypothesis testing. The Spearman correlation coefficient test was used to analyze the strength and direction of the relationships between the research variables. The first hypothesis examined the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty.

Table 6: Spearman Correlation Coefficient between Service Quality and Customer Loyalty

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
Service Quality	0.678	0.000

Table 6 shows a Spearman correlation coefficient of 0.678, with a P-value of 0.000, indicating a strong and significant positive correlation between service quality and customer loyalty. This result supports the first hypothesis, confirming that better service quality is associated with higher levels of customer loyalty. The second hypothesis tested the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Table 7: Spearman Correlation Coefficient Result

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
Customer Satisfaction	0.701	0.000

Table 7 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.701 with a P-value of 0.000, suggesting a very strong positive relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. This finding confirms the second hypothesis, indicating that higher customer satisfaction is significantly related to increased customer loyalty. The third hypothesis explored the relationship between trust and customer loyalty.

Table 8: Spearman Correlation Coefficient between Trust and Customer Loyalty

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	P-value
Trust	0.722	0.000

Table 8 indicates a correlation coefficient of 0.722 and a P-value of 0.000, revealing a strong and significant positive correlation between trust and customer loyalty. This result supports the third hypothesis, demonstrating that increased customer trust is closely associated with greater loyalty. Finally, Friedman's ANOVA test was used to assess whether there were any statistically significant differences in the rankings of service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust.

Table 9: Friedman's Analysis of Variance

Variables	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	P-value
Service Quality	2.87	18.654	0.000
Customer Satisfaction	3.12		
Trust	3.01		

Table 9 presents the results of Friedman's test, which revealed a significant difference in the mean ranks of the variables (Chi-Square = 18.654, P-value = 0.000). This suggests that respondents ranked these variables differently in terms of their importance to customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction receiving the highest mean rank. In conclusion, all three hypotheses were supported by the statistical tests. The Spearman correlation results demonstrated significant positive relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty. Furthermore, Friedman's ANOVA test confirmed the relative importance of these variables in influencing customer loyalty. These findings highlight the critical role of service quality, customer satisfaction, and trust in maintaining loyal customers within the context of government service offices.

V. Conclusion

The primary objective of this research was to investigate the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty in the context of government service offices in the East of Gilan Province. The study aimed to determine how these key factors influence customer loyalty and provide a deeper understanding of how organizations can enhance their service offerings to retain their customers. Data was collected through a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire, which was designed to gather respondents' opinions on these variables. The data collection tools used included both library methods for secondary data and field methods for primary data, ensuring a comprehensive approach to understanding the dynamics at play. To ensure the research's reliability and validity, several tests were conducted. The initial questionnaire was presented to five university professors and experts in the field, who evaluated its content for relevance and appropriateness. This peer-review process helped refine the questions and ensure they accurately measured the variables of interest. The reliability of the questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and all coefficients were found to be above 0.70, indicating high reliability and consistency of the questionnaire. The results of the validity tests confirmed that the questionnaire was well-designed and suited to measure the constructs it intended to assess. The descriptive statistics showed that 63% of the respondents were male, and the most common age group was 31-40 years (34%). Additionally, 38% of respondents had a bachelor's degree, which represented the highest educational level in the sample. These demographic insights provided context for interpreting the relationships between the study's key variables. The hypothesis tests revealed significant positive relationships between service quality, customer satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty. Spearman correlation coefficients demonstrated strong associations between these variables, with customer satisfaction and trust having the highest correlations with customer loyalty. Friedman's analysis of variance further confirmed that respondents ranked customer satisfaction as the most important factor influencing their loyalty, followed closely by trust and service quality. Based on the results of the hypothesis tests, several practical suggestions can be made. For Hypothesis 1, which examined the relationship between service quality and customer loyalty, it is recommended that government service offices focus on improving the quality of their services, as better service quality is associated with higher customer loyalty. For Hypothesis 2, related to customer satisfaction and loyalty, efforts should be made to regularly assess and improve customer satisfaction levels, as this is the most significant factor affecting loyalty. Regarding Hypothesis 3, which explored the relationship

between trust and customer loyalty, building and maintaining trust with customers should be a priority, as it is strongly linked to increased loyalty. By implementing these strategies, government service offices can enhance their overall customer retention and satisfaction levels.

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