# Can Justice in Public Services Affect Complaints and Behavioral Intentions?

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## ABSTRACT

Research in marketing that positions justice as an antecedent variable remains relatively limited, especially in the context of public services. Yet, users of public services possess unique characteristics—they play a dual role as citizens bound by law and as consumers expecting optimal service. Therefore, research with this theme and subject remains relevant and interesting to explore. This study involved residents throughout the City of Yogyakarta, with a total of 183 respondents selected using the convenience sampling method. After validity and reliability testing, the analysis results showed that service justice has an influence as an antecedent variable on behavioral intention, both directly and through a mediating variable. In this case, complaint proved to function as a mediator that strengthens the influence of service justice on behavioral intention. However, for future research improvements, it is necessary to add more detailed indicators for the dimensions of justice, or even separate the justice dimensions into new variables, to better clarify the role of each dimension.

**Keywords:** justice, complaint, behavioral intention

## INTRODUCTION

There is still a lack of research in service marketing that involves the factor of justice which should be provided by marketers to service users. Most research involves other factors, such as service quality in relation to satisfaction, attitude, trust, and loyalty. In fact, involving the factor of justice in services can also be linked to those variables. Secondly, there is also a lack of research involving services to the public or community, especially compared to the much more abundant research involving the business sector. Yet, public sector services in some countries can be the starting point for business activities, such as those related to business licensing processes.

Research that positions justice as an antecedent variable was initially developed by scholars in the field of human resource management (HRM), aiming to understand how employees assess the management decisions they receive. For example, the study by Folger and Konovsky (1989) explored the influence of justice on job satisfaction, trust, and employee commitment. On the other hand, Niehoff and Moorman (1993) examined the impact of justice on employee behavior in organizations.

The basic idea of justice in HRM research was later adopted by researchers in the field of marketing. The focus shifted to how consumers evaluate management's treatment of customers, such as

satisfaction with responses to complaints (Severt and Rompf, 2006), or perceptions of justice in the services received and their relationship to consumer intentions to reuse the service (Cengiz et al., 2007).

Assuming the same concept of justice, research using justice as an antecedent variable is not only relevant in the business sector but can also be applied to the public service sector. In the context of public service, such as at government offices, people processing personal documents occupy dual roles: as citizens who must comply with legal regulations and as consumers who require services.

Due to this dual position, the public has no alternative but to follow administrative procedures. Otherwise, not only will their personal needs go unmet, but they may also be considered law violators. This is different from consumers in the business sector who are free to choose products or services as they wish and directly experience the benefits of the transaction. Therefore, the public needs government services that are just, so they feel comfortable taking care of their needs.

Justice is viewed as the granting of rights to the public in all aspects of life without unreasonable compromise (Whiteman & Mamen, 2002). Since it is a right, if people feel they are not receiving the services they are entitled to, they may give suggestions, protest, or even file complaints (Filho et al., 2023). A positive response to complaints can influence someone to form behavioral intentions (Cengiz et al., 2007). However, just service delivery alone may already lead the public to form behavioral intentions, even without the need to go through the complaint process (Hao et al., 2024).

With the above explanation, although this research may not offer significant novelty, understanding the relationship between justice, complaint, and behavioral intention variables can still contribute scientifically—especially in the field of public service marketing, which is still relatively underexplored in academic publications.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Justice

Justice theory is derived from equity theory, fair choice, and justice itself (Filho et al., 2023). These theories primarily analyze the need for relational equality among stakeholders involved in a transaction. According to Tax et al. (1998), justice theory is relevant in marketing contexts because service provider negligence may trigger customer complaints.

Jacobs and Liebrecht (2023) and Whiteman & Mamen (2002) define justice as the full granting of rights without unreasonable compromise, while Huang and Lin (2005) view it as a judgment of how one person treats another. Understanding the concept of justice is important to explain public responses in conflict situations (Tax et al., 1998; Aguilar-Rojas et al., 2024), as differences in justice perceptions within services can affect individual emotions (Schoefer & Ennew, 2005). Conflict arises when there are discrepancies in values, goals, or beliefs among individuals, and applying justice principles can help mitigate potential conflicts (Jacobs & Liebrecht, 2023).

Based on the above explanation, justice is generally classified into three dimensions: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice (Jacobs & Liebrecht, 2023; El Balshy & Ismael, 2023; Filho et al., 2023; Nantamu et al., 2024). Distributive justice refers to perceptions of fairness regarding outcomes received, aligned with the contribution made in an exchange (El Balshy & Ismael, 2023). Its characteristics include equity, outcome fairness, and fulfillment of individual needs (Kwun & Alshare, 2007).

Procedural justice focuses on perceptions of fairness in processes, policies, and mechanisms used to make decisions or resolve conflicts (Nantamu et al., 2024). Aspects include convenience, efficiency, and speed of the process (Wang, 2008). Meanwhile, interactional justice relates to fair treatment in social interactions, demonstrated through respect, politeness, empathy, and warm, honest communication (Jacobs & Liebrecht, 2023; Wang, 2008).

Justice dimensions also influence the likelihood of complaints from the public (Colquitt, 2001). Individuals who feel unfairly treated tend to express dissatisfaction through complaints or protests over unmet rights. However, not everyone has the courage or willingness to file a complaint. For this reason, the presence of complaints is considered positive, as it enables organizations to identify and correct service deficiencies (Cengiz et al., 2007). On the other hand, customers who are reluctant to complain may hinder the flow of valuable feedback used to assess quality, implement improvements, and maintain loyalty. Meanwhile, Filho et al. (2023) argue that justice can have an indirect negative impact on complaints if consumers are dissatisfied with how their justice-related concerns are handled. Based on this, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Justice has a positive effect on public complaints.

Moreover, justice also contributes positively to behavioral intention. All three dimensions of justice have been proven to encourage people to display positive behaviors or provide favorable recommendations (Ortiz et al., 2017; Chih et al., 2017; Wang, 2008). Hao et al. (2024) also found that procedurally fair services can enhance behavioral intention, either directly or through the moderating role of interactional justice. Accordingly, the proposed hypothesis is:

H2: Justice has a positive effect on the public's intention to reuse the service.

## Complaint

Complaints arise when an individual's expectations are unmet in response to the actions of another party. In public services, the tension between conflicting government objectives and public complaint responses has both theoretical and practical significance (Zhao & Cheng, 2024). Today, the use of technology such as automated machines can help improve decision quality and service satisfaction, thus reducing complaints (Lobo et al., 2024). However, a low number of complaints does not always indicate satisfaction; it may instead reflect a reluctance to speak up (Riofita, 2025).

In fact, complaints are vital as tools for service evaluation and improvement (Cengiz et al., 2007). Every complaint deserves attention because customers have social networks that can influence others' opinions (Filho et al., 2023). Complaints may take the form of direct communication with the service provider or through third-party channels (Wang, 2008).

Regarding the intention to reuse services, customers who file complaints and receive an appropriate response tend to show repeated behavioral intentions and contribute through constructive word-of-mouth feedback (Filho et al., 2023; Harris, 2003). Conversely, customers who withhold complaints may hinder the identification of problems, reduce opportunities for improvement, and lower customer retention (Cengiz et al., 2007). Based on the above, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Public complaints have a positive effect on behavioral intention.

## Behavioral Intention

Behavioral intention has various definitions and includes several dimensions, one of which is closely related to loyalty. It reflects an individual's commitment to performing a certain action in the future (Wang, 2008). Poyoi et al (2024) and Baumann et al. (2005) measured it through aspects such as word-of-mouth communication, recommendation, lack of interest in alternatives, and long-term loyalty. Meanwhile, George & Sahadevan (2024) and Tian-Cole et al. (2002) assessed it via behaviors such as sharing positive experiences, reusing the service, willingness to pay more, and repeat purchases. Vatamanescu et al. (2025) and Chih et al. (2017), simplified it into two main dimensions: positive word of mouth (WoM) and repurchase intention. Ortiz et al. (2017) added that these two intentions are influenced by emotional conditions; empathy fosters positive behavior, while anger triggers revenge or avoidance.

In relation to the previous variables, behavioral intention is influenced by justice dimensions (Hao et al., 2024; Ortiz et al., 2017; Chih et al., 2017; Wang, 2008) and customer complaints (Filho et al., 2023; Cengiz et al., 2007; Harris, 2003). Thus, behavioral intention serves as the dependent variable for both factors. The relationship among these variables can be illustrated in the research model shown in Figure 1.
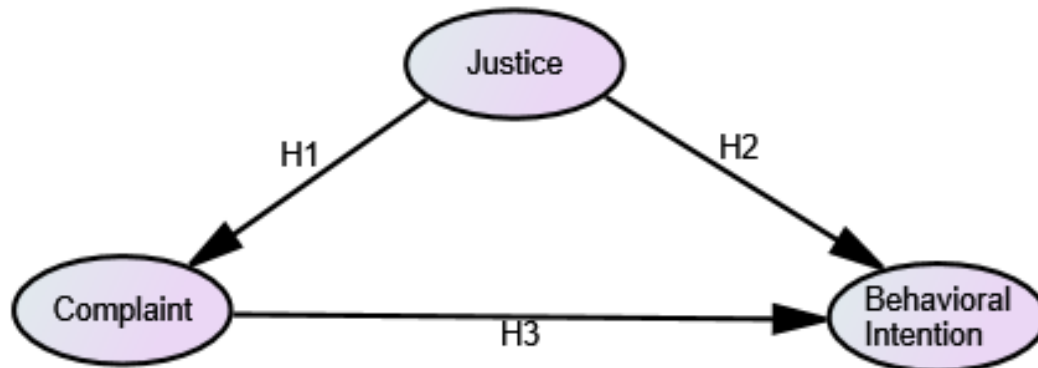


Figure 1: Research Model

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a population of residents who had previously handled their affairs at all government offices within the Yogyakarta City Government Office. From this population, 183 respondents were selected as the sample. The sampling technique used a convenience sampling approach, which involved residents completing their affairs at a government office within the Yogyakarta City Government Office. This sampling technique was chosen because, although it involved respondents from all government offices, the population size and characteristics could not be identified, necessitating the use of a non-probability sampling technique.

All research variables were measured using a questionnaire with a 5-point interval scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The justice variable consisted of 6 indicator items, covering dimensions of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice. The complaint variable was measured using 2 items, while behavioral intention was measured using 3 items.

The collected data were analyzed using the SEM-AMOS 22.0 software. The testing procedure included obtaining Goodness of Fit, testing indicator validity through the standardized loading factor, testing reliability using composite reliability, testing hypotheses, and calculating the magnitude of influence between variables.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the previously screened data, calculations and model testing were conducted using the SEM approach with AMOS 22.0. A summary of the model calculation results is presented as shown in Figure 2.
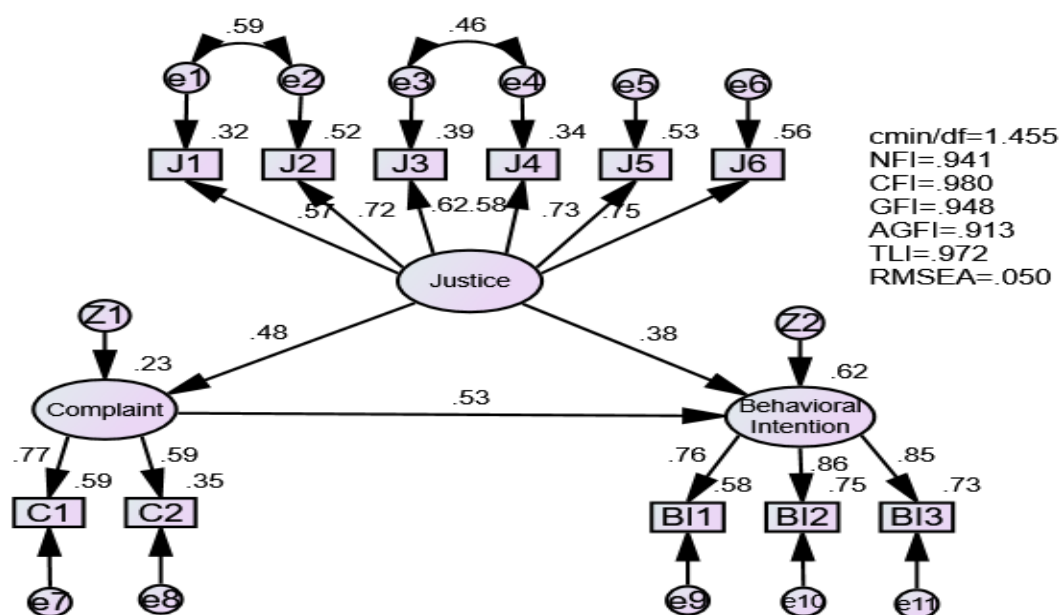
Figure 2: Fit Model

Based on the series shown in Figure 2, the Goodness of Fit (GoF) test of the research model using the SEM and AMOS approach shows a cmin/df value below the critical threshold of 2.00. This result indicates that there is no significant difference between the theoretical/predicted model and the input covariance matrix of the empirical data. The model's fit is further supported by the measurement results of NFI, CFI, GFI, AGFI, and TLI, all of which fall within the acceptable fit range of 0.90–1.00. Similarly, the RMSEA value is below the critical fit threshold of 0.08.

In addition, the GoF results are reinforced by the multivariate normality test, using the Bollen-Stine bootstrap approach, which produced a probability value of .478—greater than the critical threshold of 5%. Therefore, it can be concluded that the proposed theoretical model and the empirical test model are overall a good fit.

To strengthen the model testing procedure, further tests were also conducted for the validity and reliability of the research indicators and variables. A summary of these calculations is presented in Table 1.

The test results in Table 1 show that all indicators for the variables of justice, complaint, and behavioral intention exceed the critical factor loading value of 0.50, thus meeting the requirement for indicators to be considered valid. Similarly, the composite reliability values surpass the acceptable threshold of 0.60. Therefore, both the indicators and variables used in this study are deemed suitable for further analysis.

Subsequently, analysis was carried out to test the hypotheses. The calculation results are summarized in Table 2.

Table 1: Calculation of Validity and Reliability Indicators

| Explanation | Code | Valid. | Reliab. |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Justice:** | | | 0,824 |
| I got a service that suits my needs | J1 | .566 | |
| I got the exact service | J2 | .719 | |
| I was informed by the rules / procedures with good service | J3 | .624 | |

| Explanation | Code | Valid. | Reliab. |
|---|---|---|---|
| I got the service in accordance with the rules / procedures | J4 | .580 | |
| Employees answered questions I complete | J5 | .725 | |
| Employees make the maintenance of the interest I felt easy | J6 | .750 | |
| **Complaint** | | | 0,638 |
| I am willing to complain of shortage of direct service to employees | C1 | ,771 | |
| I am willing to give suggestions for improvement of services to employees | C2 | ,593 | |
| **Behavioral Intention:** | | | 0,867 |
| I willing (happy) got back in the future services | BI1 | ,764 | |
| I am willing to motivate others to take care of its requirements in the government offices | BI2 | ,863 | |
| I am willing to improve relations with regard to the government offices | BI3 | ,853 | |

Table 2: Recapitulation Significance Calculation Model Research

| Hypotheses | Standardized Estimate | P | Conclusion |
|---|---|---|---|
| H1: J → C | ,481 | *** | significant |
| H2: J → BI | ,376 | *** | significant |
| H3: C → BI | ,534 | *** | significant |

From Table 2, it can be seen that all variable coefficients show positive values. In addition, the calculated probability value for each hypothesis is below 1%, indicating that all hypotheses are statistically significant.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The development of marketing performance achievement is no longer solely directed at generating profit through transactions, but increasingly emphasizes strategies that foster long-term relationships between organizations and their target markets. The theoretical model/framework developed in this research provides a more detailed perspective on the long-term relationship between government institutions—as public service providers—and the community, by exploring the role of justice in service delivery.

This study successfully validates all three proposed hypotheses. The positive influence of justice on public complaints (H1) suggests that the Yogyakarta City Government has provided administrative services perceived as fair by its citizens. This perception of justice is appreciated by the public, who are willing to offer constructive criticism, suggestions, and even complaints when they encounter shortcomings or errors in the delivery of fair services.

The study also confirms a positive influence of justice on behavioral intention (H2). This indicates that the just implementation of rules and regulations by the government offices and personnel in Yogyakarta is viewed favorably by the community. As a result, citizens are inclined to engage in positive behaviors aligned with the justice-oriented policies implemented by the government. Furthermore, an in-depth look at the behavioral intention indicators reveals that citizens are not only motivated by personal interests, but also actively encourage others to take care of their administrative matters at government offices in Yogyakarta.

Lastly, the model testing results support H3, which posits a positive influence of complaints on behavioral intention. This finding shows that citizens are not only willing to participate in improving administrative services delivered fairly by the government, but they also have a strong intention to maintain engagement and even encourage others to utilize the services offered by Yogyakarta's government offices. The results also indicate that complaints function as a mediating variable, strengthening the effect of justice on behavioral intention.

## CONCLUSION

This study successfully confirms the three proposed hypotheses. One of the strengths of the study lies in the selection of the research subjects—residents of Yogyakarta Municipality—based on the assumption of relatively homogeneous or similar heterogeneity in the population. All respondents had completed their administrative matters at government offices, even though their individual needs might differ.

This research has both strengths and limitations. One key strength is that the relationships between variables show both direct and indirect positive influences of justice in service delivery on citizens' behavioral intentions toward public (government) services. Second, the GoF model results revealed a covariance between two indicators of distributive justice and two indicators of procedural justice. The covariance implies that each pair of indicators can actually be represented by the indicator with the higher value. In this study, those are accurate service and clear service regulations.

However, this second strength also highlights a limitation: the potential insufficiency of assessment indicators, which means the study may not have fully captured the key indicators that could enhance each dimension of justice more clearly. Recommendations for future research include adding more important and relevant indicators. Two, if there are numerous such indicators, it is advisable to separate the dimensions of justice and test the effect of each dimension independently on the complaint and behavioral intention variables. A third weakness relates to the research method. Although respondents from all government offices within the Yogyakarta City Government Office were involved, the convenience sampling technique made the results less likely to be generalizable to similar studies. Therefore, future research could be expanded to include respondents from other government offices, similar to those in the Yogyakarta City Government Office.

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