

# **The Mediating Role of Trust in the Influence of Communication and Customer Experience on Customer Satisfaction at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office**

**Septian Yubil Sumurung Sihombing, Elfitra Desy Surya, Husni Muhamarram Ritonga**

## **Abstract**

This research aims to analyze the effects of communication, and customer experience on customer satisfaction with trust as a mediating variable at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office. The research employs a quantitative explanatory approach using primary data collect from 372 passport applicants. Data were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares- Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) technique with SmartPLS. The results indicate that customer experience has a positive and significant effect on both trust and customer satisfaction. Communication is found to have a positive and significant effect on trust; however, it does not have a direct significant effect on customer satisfaction. Trust, in turn, significantly influences customer satisfaction and plays a mediating role in the relationship between communication and customer satisfaction, as well as between customer experience and customer satisfaction. The coefficient of determination demonstrates that the proposed model has a moderate explanatory power in explaining variations in trust and customer satisfaction. These findings underscore the importance of enhancing customer experience and fostering public trust to improve satisfaction with immigration services. While communication alone may not directly increase satisfaction, its role in building trust is crucial. This study contributes to the public service literature by providing empirical evidence on the mediating role of trust in the context of immigration services and offers practical implications for improving service quality in public sector organizations.

**Keywords:** Customer Experience, Communication, Trust, Customer Satisfaction

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## Introduction

Public service constitutes a fundamental pillar in the realization of good, accountable, and transparent governance. In the contemporary era of globalization and digital transformation, public service is no longer merely an administrative obligation, but has evolved into a strategic instrument that determines governmental legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Government institutions are therefore required to deliver public services that are fast, accurate, efficient, and citizen-centered, while simultaneously ensuring customer satisfaction as a primary indicator of service performance.

Global developments indicate that many developed countries have long adopted public service transformations grounded in quality management and customer experience orientation. This shift reflects a broader movement toward customer-oriented governance, in which communication effectiveness, and customer experience are positioned as key determinants of public satisfaction with government services. Consequently, the evaluation of public services extends beyond procedural compliance to encompass the quality of interactions between service providers and citizens, which plays a critical role in fostering sustainable public trust.

At the national level, improving the quality of public services in Indonesia has become a pressing societal demand, particularly within the immigration service sector. Data from [1] show that the national public satisfaction index reached 79.5 percent in 2023, categorized as “good.” However, this achievement remains insufficient given the scale and diversity of government institutions providing public services. Immigration services, despite being positioned as a role model for public service delivery at both national and international levels, continue to receive public complaints related to prolonged service duration, limited transparency, and inadequate communication by service:emphasized bureaucratic reform and digital transformation initiatives, including the implementation of Electronic Passports (E-Passports) and the M-Paspal application.

Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office represents one of the technical implementing units of the Directorate General of Immigration that faces these challenges directly. Institutional data indicate that between January and June 2025, the office received 1,756 public complaints, encompassing both grievances and service-related inquiries, particularly regarding passport issuance. This condition signals the persistence of service delivery problems that require systematic academic examination.

Communication constitutes a strategic variable in public service delivery, functioning as a bridge between government institutions and citizens. Organizational communication theory in the public sector emphasizes that information flows directly affect institutional effectiveness, organizational culture, and performance. [2] identifies a direct relationship between rational communication practices and public sector organizational performance, mediated by motivational factors such as moral responsibility. In the immigration service context, effective communication involves not only the transmission of procedural information but also the creation of transparency and two-way engagement with service users. [3] further asserts that strategic communication is a prerequisite for transparency and effectiveness in public administration, while [4] highlight that information openness is essential for building public trust and ensuring accurate public understanding.

Customer experience has increasingly gained prominence as a central construct in evaluating public service quality. In the public sector context, citizens are no longer passive recipients of services but active participants in the co-creation of service experiences. [5] emphasizes that citizen involvement in service improvement initiatives contributes significantly to higher satisfaction levels. [6] demonstrates that public service innovation enhances both customer satisfaction and organizational efficiency, while [7] underline the role of smart technologies in shaping service environments that foster customer engagement. In immigration services, customer experience is influenced by service speed, physical facilities, staff attitudes, and information clarity. [8] further confirm that positive service provider attitudes are strongly

associated with enhanced customer experience.

Beyond communication, and customer experience, trust emerges as a crucial mediating variable in explaining public satisfaction. Trust is formed through consistent, transparent, and accountable interactions between public institutions and citizens. [9] demonstrate that improvements in service quality are directly associated with higher levels of customer trust, while [10] show that trust strengthens the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction. [11] further confirms that positive service experiences foster trust, which subsequently enhances satisfaction. In digital service contexts, [12] and [13] reveal that electronic service quality influences e-trust, which in turn affects customer satisfaction. Accordingly, trust functions as a mediating mechanism linking communication, social behavior, and customer experience to public satisfaction within immigration services.

The interrelationships among communication, customer experience, trust, and customer satisfaction have been widely examined in prior studies, although empirical findings remain inconsistent. Some studies emphasize communication as the primary determinant of public organizational performance, while others position trust as a key mediating variable between service quality and satisfaction. Similarly, certain scholars focus on service experience as a direct antecedent of trust, whereas others highlight customer journey mapping and service innovation as dominant explanatory factors. These variations indicate the presence of a research gap, particularly in the context of immigration services, which necessitates an integrative analytical framework that simultaneously examines communication, customer experience, and trust as determinants of public satisfaction.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Framework Communication**

Communication is a fundamental process within organizations, particularly in the context of public service delivery. According to Willard V as cited in [14], communication is defined as the activity of conveying intended meaning from the sender to the receiver in order to elicit the desired behavior. This definition aligns with Davis as cited in [14], who describes communication as the process of transmitting information and understanding from one individual to another.

In public organizations, communication can be understood as the process of exchanging information, ideas, and meanings among individuals or groups to achieve shared objectives. [2] emphasizes that communication is not merely an exchange of information but also a strategic instrument for fostering coordination, synergy, and comprehensive understanding within organizations. In the context of public services, communication plays a critical role, as the quality of interaction between public officials and citizens significantly influences public trust and satisfaction.

Effective communication in public service delivery can be measured through several indicators, including communication quality, clarity of information delivery, utilization of communication media, and a communication climate characterized by openness, honesty, friendliness, and mutual respect [14].

### **Customer Experience**

Customer experience refers to an individual's subjective response to stimuli provided by an organization or service provider, either directly or indirectly. Schmitt as cited in [15] defines customer experience as a personal event encompassing emotional, cognitive, sensory, and social responses experienced during interactions with products or services.

In the public service context, customer experience can be interpreted as citizens' subjective responses to direct or indirect interactions with public service institutions, shaping personal impressions, satisfaction, and trust in service quality [15]. [16] further emphasize that

satisfaction is determined not only by service functionality but also by emotional experiences during service encounters.

The dimensions of customer experience include sense (sensory experiences), feel (emotional responses), think (cognitive experiences), act (behavioral influences), and relate (social connections) [15].

### Trust

Trust is defined as the belief of individuals to act in a certain way based on the expectation that an organization will fulfill its promises and obligations. Barnes as cited in [17] explains that trust emerges when consumers believe that an organization will meet their expectations.

In the context of public service, particularly immigration services, trust refers to citizens' confidence that public officials provide services professionally, transparently, fairly, consistently, and with a strong orientation toward public satisfaction.

The indicators of trust include integrity, competence, consistency, openness, and loyalty (Robbins & Coulter, as cited in [17]).

### Public Satisfaction

Public satisfaction refers to the emotional state that arises after individuals compare their expectations with the actual performance of services received. Kotler as cited in [18] defines customer satisfaction as the level of feeling resulting from the comparison between perceived performance and expectations.

In public services, satisfaction can be understood as citizens' feelings that emerge after evaluating whether public service performance meets or exceeds their expectations. According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry as cited in [18], satisfaction can be measured through five service quality dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

### Conceptual Framework

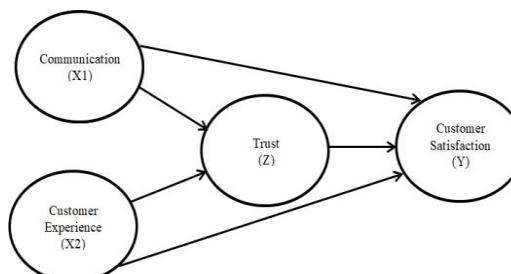


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### Research Hypothesis

- H1 : Communication has a positive and significant effect on passport applicant trust at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.
- H2 : Customer experience has a positive and significant effect on passport applicant trust at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.
- H3 : Trust has a positive and significant effect on passport applicant satisfaction at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.
- H4 : Communication has a positive and significant effect on passport applicant satisfaction at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.
- H5 : Customer experience has a positive and significant effect on passport applicant satisfaction at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.
- H6 : Communication has a positive and significant effect on passport applicant satisfaction at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office, mediated by Trust.

H7 : Customer Experience has a positive and significant effect on passport applicant satisfaction at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office, mediated by Trust.

## Research Methodology

### Type of Research

The type of research used by the researcher is explanatory research with a quantitative method. According to [19] explanatory research is a research that explains the relationship among variables through hypothesis testing, as well to determine the position and influence of each variable examined.

### Research Location and Research Time

This research was conducted at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office, located at Jalan Medan KM 11,5, Purbasari Sub districk, Tapian Dolok District, Simalungun Regency. The study was carried out over a period of five months, from July to November 2025.

### Population and Sample

The population of this research consisted of applicants who had completed the passport application process at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office during the period from July to September 2025. Based on data obtained from Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office, the total number of passport applicants whose passports were successfully issued during this period was 5.180 individuals.

The Slovin formula was used for sampling:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{5180}{5180 \times (0,05)^2 + 1} \\ &= 371,32 \\ &= 372 \end{aligned}$$

Sample in this research was 372 individuals who had completed the passport application process at Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.

### Research Data Sources

The data sources used in this research were primary data

## Result

### Outer Model Analysis Validity Test

Table 1. Values Outer Loadings

	Communication	Customer Experience	Customer Satisfaction	Trust
CE1	0.927			
CE2	0.946			
CE3	0.963			
CE4	0.954			
CE5	0.939			

CS1			0.926	
CS2			0.909	
CS3			0.913	
CS4			0.884	
CS5			0.898	
Com1	0.953			
Com2	0.936			
Com3	0.937			
Com4	0.939			
T1			0.925	
T2			0.942	
T3			0.939	
T4			0.966	
T5			0.947	

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2026

Based on the values in Table 1 above, it shows the results of testing the outer model through the loading factor value / Outer loadings: All indicators for each variable have loading values

$\geq 0.70$ . This indicates that each indicator measured is valid and robust. Therefore, it can be concluded that all items in the questionnaire meet the validity criteria, as shown in the following figure.

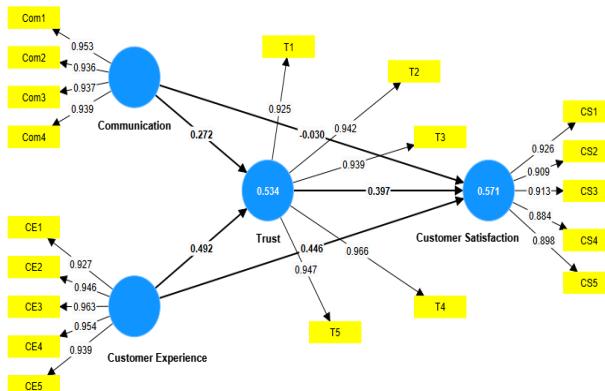


Figure 2. Graphical Output Outer Loading

In this research there is an equation and the equation consists of two substructures : substructure 1:

$$Z = \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_1 X_2 + e_1$$

$$Z = 0.272 X_1 + 0.492 X_2 + e_1$$

substructure 2:

$$Y = \beta_2 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_2 X_3 + \beta_1 Z + e_2$$

$$Y = -0.030 X_1 + 0.446 X_2 + 0.397 + e_2$$

## Reliability Test

**Table 2.** Construct Reliability and Validity Test

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Communication	0.957	0.961	0.969	0.886
Customer Experience	0.971	0.972	0.977	0.895
Customer Satisfaction	0.946	0.946	0.958	0.821
Trust	0.969	0.970	0.976	0.891

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2026

Table 2 above shows that the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all constructs are above 0.70. This indicates that all indicators have high internal consistency and can be relied upon to measure their respective constructs. Therefore, the research instrument is deemed reliable and suitable for use in testing the structural model.

### Coefficient of Determination (R2)

Evaluating a model with PLS begins by examining the R-square for each dependent latent variable. The table below shows the results of R-square estimation using SmartPLS.

**Table 3.** R Square Results

	R-square	R-square adjusted
Customer Satisfaction	0.571	0.568
Trust	0.534	0.531

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2026

In table 3 there is an R square value on both dependent variables for the Trust variable there is an R square value of 0.534 meaning the influence of Communication, Customer Experience are 53,4% the rest is on other variables outside the model, so it can be concluded that this model is considered moderate. The R square value of Customer satisfaction (passport applicant satisfaction) is 0.571 meaning the influence of Communication, Social Behaviour, Customer Experience and Trust are 57,1% the rest is on other variables outside the model, so it can be concluded that this model is considered moderate.

### Structural Model Testing (Inner Model) Hypothesis Testing

#### Direct Influence Between Variables

The direct influence between variables can be seen in the path coefficients. The data processing results show the direct influence values, as shown in the following table.

**Table 4.** Path Coefficients (Direct Effect)

	Path Coefisien	T statistics	P values	Conclusion
Communication > Customer Satisfaction	-0.030	0.348	0.728	Rejected
Communication > Trust	0.272	4.292	0.000	Accepted
Customer Experience > Customer Satisfaction	0.446	5.034	0.000	Accepted
Customer Experience > Trust	0.492	8.739	0.000	Accepted
Trust > Customer Satisfaction	0.397	6.237	0.000	Accepted

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2026

In the results of Table 4, there are direct influence values as follows:

1. Communicatio has a negative and not significant effect on kepuasan pelanggan (customer

satisfaction) with a path coefficient value of -0.030 and a T-statistics value of 0.348. The results of this research contradict the results of research from [20] which states that communication has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction at the Surakarta Customs Office.

2. Communication has a positive and significant effect on Trust with a path coefficient value of 0.272 and a T-statistics value of 4.292. The results of this research are in line with the results of research conducted by [24] which concluded that communication has a positive and significant influence on trust.
3. Customer experience has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction with a path coefficient value of 0.446 and a T-statistics value of 5.034. The finding of this research are in line with prior research conducted by [21], which demonstrated that customer experience has a simultaneous and significant effect at Rumah Photo in Langsa City. The results of research by [22] also concluded that customer experience has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction among E-Commerce X users in DKI Jakarta.
4. Customer experience has a positive and significant effect on Trust with a path coefficient value of 0.492 and a T-statistics value of 8.739. The results of this research are also in line with the results of [23] research which states that customer experience has a significant influence on trust at J.CO DONUTS & COFFEE PARAGON MALL AND JAVA SUPERMALL SEMARANG.
5. Trust has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction with a path coefficient value of 0.397 and a T-statistics value of 6.237. The finding of this research are in line with prior research conducted by [25] , which demonstrated that trust exerts a positive and statistically significant influence on customer satisfaction at Bratagi Supermarket, Gatot Subroto, Medan. The results of research by [26] also concluded that Trust has a positive and significant effect on service satisfaction at the Medan City Population and Civil Registration Office.

### Indirect Influence Between Variables

The indirect influence between variables can be seen in the specific indirect effects values. The data processing results show the indirect effect values, as shown in Table 5 below:

**Table 5.** Specific Indirect Effects

	Path Coefisien	T statistics	P values	Conclusion
Communication -> Trust -> Customer Satisfaction	0.108	3.153	0.002	Accepted
Customer Experience -> Trust -> Customer Satisfaction	0.195	5.038	0.000	Accepted

Source: Smart PLS Output, 2026

In table 5 there is an indirect influence between variables which will be explained as follows:

1. Customer experience has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction through Trust with a path coefficient value of 0.195 and a T-statistic value of 5.038
2. Communication has a positive and significant influence on kepuasan pelanggan (customer satisfaction) through Trust with a path coefficient value of 0.108 and a T-statistic value of 3.153.

### Conclusion

1. Customer experience has a positive and significant effect on kepuasan pelanggan (customer satisfaction) in Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.
2. Customer experience has a positive and significant effect on Trust in Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.

3. Communication has a negative and not significant effect on kepuasan pelanggan (customer satisfaction) in Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.
4. Communication has a positive and significant effect on Trust in Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office
5. Trust has a positive and significant effect on kepuasan pelanggan (customer satisfaction) in Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.
6. Customer experience has a positive and significant influence on customer satisfaction through Trust in Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.
7. Communication has a positive and significant influence on kepuasan pelanggan customer satisfaction through Trust in Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office.

## Suggestion

1. Pematang Siantar Class II Check Point Immigration Office should prioritize the enhancement of customer experience, as it has been proven to significantly influence both trust and customer satisfaction. Improvements should focus on service efficiency, clarity of procedures, physical service facilities, and the professionalism of service officers. Creating a positive and consistent service experience is essential to strengthening public confidence and satisfaction with immigration services.
2. Although communication does not directly affect customer satisfaction, its significant influence on trust indicates that communication remains a critical strategic factor. Therefore, immigration service providers are encouraged to improve the quality, transparency, and consistency of information delivery through both face-to-face interactions and digital service channels. Clear and transparent communication can effectively build trust, which subsequently enhances customer satisfaction.
3. Since trust plays a mediating role in the relationship between communication, customer experience, and customer satisfaction, trust- building initiatives should be institutionalized within public service management. These initiatives may include strengthening service integrity, ensuring fairness and consistency in service delivery, and implementing transparent mechanisms for managing complaints and public feedback.
4. From an academic perspective, this research confirms the importance of trust as a mediating variable in public service satisfaction models. Future research is encouraged to incorporate additional variables, such as service innovation, digital service quality, organizational image, or perceived justice, to improve the explanatory power of the model.
5. This research was limited to a single immigration office and employed a cross-sectional approach, future studies should expand the research scope to other public service institutions or regions and apply longitudinal designs to capture changes in customer perceptions over time. Such efforts would enhance the generalizability and robustness of findings in public sector service research.

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