AN EXAMINATION OF THE IMPACT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICE FACTORS ON PUBLIC TRUST

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation evaluates the current phenomenon of public distrust in local government. More specifically, the research focuses on significant determinants of public trust in local government: public service quality and the way these are delivered to local residents. Drawing upon Coulter and Coulter's (2002) pioneering research, this study focuses on the relationship between customer trust antecedents and service providers and extends their research to local government. Evidence suggests that components of service quality (i.e., promptness, reliability, customization, and competence) and the manner of service delivery (i.e., civility and compassion) have direct bearing on customer trust in service providers. Scholars offer further indication that these factors are subject to a moderating effect when length of relationship (residency) between customer (resident) and service provider (local government) is considered. Provided that service delivery is at the core of local government's mission, this research seeks to measure the impact of local government services on constituent trust with additional inquiry into the moderating effect of length of constituent residency. Testing of hypotheses included split results with the correlation hypotheses (H1 – H6) being supported and the moderating hypotheses (H7(a-f)) failing to be supported. Findings and implications of this research demonstrate how local government service and way of delivery can be managed such that public trust is engendered.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL PROBLEM STATEMENT

Trust in government is a multidimensional and complex construct that impacts the lives of municipal employees and the citizens they serve. When constituents recognize that trust is compromised, they feel compelled to voice their concerns (Christensen, Yamamoto, & Aoyagi, 2020). Opening media newsfeeds, one encounters numerous accounts of government state of affairs that have a direct bearing on trust in government. From pundits discussing national partisan strategies to local media's demands for municipal action, people are inundated with opinions reflecting various levels of trust in government. Although this phenomenon is not new, research indicates that growing sentiments reveal a clear consensus: public trust in government is declining (Welch et al., 2005). Confirming this, Pew Research Center (2021) reports that since its analysis began in 1958, public trust in government is near historic lows. This decline, evidenced by Pew's annual reports, reveals that people trusting government dropped from 73% in 1958 to 24% in 2021.

Moreover, research demonstrates that trust in specific levels of government, including local, are also on the decline (Chanley et al., 2000). Unfortunately, attempts to determine the precise cause of public distrust appear to be elusive with little empirical evidence to examine (Citrin, 1974; Citrin & Green, 1986; Mitchell & Scott, 1987; Miller, 1974; Williams, 1987). Nevertheless, declining trust, as a burgeoning problem with attending ramifications, is worthy of in-depth inquiry. To that end, establishing that a problem exists serves as only half of the investigation. There must also be an examination as to why this is a problem. This dissertation attempted to uncover reasons related to trust in one municipality in Northwest Ohio.

Stated Research Questions

The overall research questions for this project concentrated on the impact of public services on residents' trust in their local government (LG). More specifically:

1) Does the public's perceived competence of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?
2) Does the public's perception of LG's ability to customize public service solutions influence public trust?
3) Does the public's perceived promptness of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?
4) Does the public's perceived reliability of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?
5) Does the public's perceived compassion of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?
6) Does the public's perceived civility of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?
7) Does length of residency have a moderating effect on trust factors such that:
    a) The effect of resident perceptions of LG competence on trust will increase as residency increases;
    b) The effect of resident perceptions of LG customization on trust will increase as residency increases;
    c) The effect of resident perceptions of LG reliability on trust will increase as residency increases;
    d) The effect of resident perceptions of LG promptness on trust will increase as

residency increases;

e) The effect of resident perceptions of LG representative compassion on trust will increase as residency increases;

f) The effect of resident perceptions of LG representative civility on trust will increase as residency increases.

Design and Overview of the Study

This dissertation utilized a quantitative action research methodology to answer these research questions. Residents of Whitehouse, a town in Northwest, Ohio with approximately 5,000 residents, served as the population from which the sample was taken. Data was collected via an online survey and was analyzed upon collection of responses submitted within a predefined submission deadline. Given the purpose of action research, the intent of this research was to garner knowledge that both a) adds to scholarly understanding of factors influencing public trust and b) provides LG leaders and practitioners with evidenced-based findings useful in applying trust-engendering and action-oriented decisions.

Summary

Chapter I offers evidence for the assertion that public trust in government is declining. Further, this section provides a rationale as to why LGs are not immune to this phenomenon. Also presented is a brief discussion on why public services are a worthy inquiry when investigating antecedents of LG public trust. Additionally, this section posits the notion that length of relationship between the public and the LG may have a moderating impact on trust. Furthermore, a quantitative action research approach is identified as the research methodology for this dissertation. Chapters II and III present the literature review as well as details of the dissertation methodology. In Chapter IV, results of the hypotheses testing are provided including additional analysis outside the initially proposed scope of the research design. Lastly, Chapter V offers an in-depth discussion on the interpretation of the tests results, implications, research limitations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Though little research has focused on determinants of public trust at the local level, research suggests that LG, with its focus on a) public service delivery and b) its proximity, accessibility, and visibility to the public is a significant medium by which levels of trust are impacted. Accordingly, these factors as well as others are examined in this review through the lens of municipal residents. Chapter II provides a review of the antecedents affecting public trust at large and the impact that service delivery, both in terms of the quality of the service as well as the perceived manner in which it is provided. Finally, this chapter presents the rationale, as informed by the literature review, for the research question under study as well as the specific hypotheses tested.

Scope and Purpose

This literature review does not investigate all forces affecting public trust. Instead, the general purpose is to understand the *that* and *why* by analyzing existing literature addressing drivers of constituent's trust in LG. More specifically, given that public services directly impact local constituents, this review evaluates literature addressing service factors that expand or reduce constituent trust in LG. Accordingly, this review provides a) five (5) emerging public trust themes with LG implications, b) a summary of service influences on constituent/customer trust, and c) a brief limitations summary of available literature. Considering the limited literature focused on trust with a LG concentration, I address this void by a) extrapolating from research focused on higher government levels and b) pulling from other scholarly domains with common trust and relationship concerns (e.g., customer service, marketing, and sales). Finally, with a research question focused on public service factors affecting public trust, this review concludes with a set of sub-research questions with associated hypotheses.

What is Public Trust?

Public trust is a familiar concept and yet a challenging construct with no uniform definitional agreement (Kim, 2009). However, academics from diverse fields have extensively researched this construct and promulgate several commonly shared components among their findings. Resnik's (2011) seminal literature review into these shared elements revealed five (5) "insights" (p. 400) into what constitutes public trust, including:

a) relationship between or among people,
b) facilitation of cooperative social interactions with dependence on shared expectations of behavior,
c) risk-taking,
d) decision to trust others due to perceived trustworthiness and,
e) felt obligation to do what is expected as influenced by ethical and legal duties.

Supporting these observed factors is McAllister's (1995) foundational work on interpersonal trust. In that work, he defines trust as "the extent to which a person is confident in, and willing to act on the basis of, the words, actions, and decision of another" (p. 25). Drawing from these collective findings, it follows that at its essence, trust is *a relational and dynamic evaluation of perceptions and expectations, upon which parties either gain or lose trust in another*.

Public Trust in Government Overview

A resourceful analysis of public trust is the seminal work by Craig Thomas (1998). His work offers a robust literature review of scholarly findings dating back to the 1960s. This effort was based on the foundational research of Baier (1986), Blau (1964), Luhman (1979), Williamson (1993), and Zucker (1986). Though their research advances comprehension of trust in general, meager progress was made in terms of trust applicability in the public sector

(Thomas, 1998). Concerned by this, Thomas advanced three oft-referenced trust constructs to assist in understanding dynamics at the LG level. First, he suggests that *fiduciary trust*, in which a person places trust in another in his or her capacity, places the unilateral obligation on the public servant to act in the other's interest. Second, *mutual trust* is bilateral, wherein expectations and obligations extend to both sides of the individual-public servant relationship. Third, *social trust* is exogenous and, along with professional norms, occurs within social systems and transcends calculative individual-LG actions. Thomas concludes this work by suggesting that each of these trust facets is embedded within all government institutions.

Given the importance of construct agreement, a contrasting claim offers broader comprehension. Hardin (1998) argues that whereas most trust research deals with the interpersonal level, trust in government is an entirely distinct phenomenon. His argument presumes that for trust to occur, there must be a) specific trust in every individual within the government institution and b) a comprehensive understanding of each government individual's role. Given Hardin's argument that this is an impossible feat, he asserts that government trust is unrealistic. Hardin draws from Luhmann (1979) in his conclusion that one cannot have trust in government, only confidence.

A review of public trust literature is incomplete without mentioning historical trend analysis. Referenced earlier is the assertion that public trust is on the decline. This claim has evidentiary value based on a review of the longitudinal data from the National Election Studies (NES) of the University of Michigan (2004). In the mid-1960s, public trust in government reached its pinnacle just as the Vietnam War commenced (Welch et al., 2005). Since that zenith, public trust has precipitously declined to this day (NES, 2004; Pew Research, 2021). Scholars attribute the continuous decline to several factors, including scandals, ineffective government performance, and policy failure (Peters, 1999).

Considering the extensive literature on public trust in general, generating an operational definition of publish trust requires synthesis. Based on multiple literature reviews, Kim (2010) offers a version that seems useful. Specifically, Kim writes, “public trust in government can be assessed by the extent to which citizens have confidence in public institutions to operate in the best interests of society and its constituents” (p. 803). This succinct yet robust definition incorporates the notion of behavioral constructs, the philosophical and missional purpose of governments, the iterative nature of performance measures, and the elevation of the public good. Given this broad-based scholarly fit, this definition is adopted when testing my hypotheses.

Next, I explore five themes related to public trust in local government that guided my dissertation questions.

Theme One: Public Trust Conceptual Forces

Examining factors influencing public trust is a formidable task necessitating dissection to ensure profitable research results (Levi & Stoker, 2003). This dissection requires discernment of thematic factors exerting force on constituent trust. A prevalent viewpoint worthy of consideration questions whether public trust reflects the public response to a political system and incumbent administration (Citrin, 1974; Miller; 1974a; Miller, 1974b; Muller & Jukam, 1977) or to public services received (Thomas, 2008). Citrin (1974) argues that much of public trust is more directly a measure of the incumbent effect. A logical extension of this view suggests that depreciation of trust reflects the public’s view of current officeholders. Broadening this position even further, Mitchell and Scott (1987) assert that any lack of trust, or confidence gap, reflects the erosion of confidence in the leader and not necessarily the government institution. This argument is germane to the evaluation of trust factors and, as such, is relevant to my research topic.

In addition to considering the effects of political versus administrative on trust, it is vital to acknowledge the dynamic force of *the whole* compared to the concept of *the part*. Specifically, public administration research emphasizes the value of recognizing variability between “the whole (regime) and the part (agency or agency units)” (Yang & Holzer, 2006, p. 117). Recognizing this enhances government leaders’ understanding that trust has diverse levels and communicates varying themes such as confidence in national, state, or local levels. Thus, to better comprehend factors shaping public trust requires acute attention to jurisdictional influencing outputs (Kirlin, 2001, p.141).

A deeper literature assessment on public trust reveals that most research centers at the national and political levels. This observation proves both helpful and harmful in understanding implications for LG. From the helpful perspective, constituents may view government holistically, at large, and indiscriminate of organizational levels. As such, scholars can draw LG implications from studies of national and state trust antecedents. Thus, given the scant scholarly work in the LG environment, researchers can extrapolate suggestions based on national and state environments, thereby adding to LG understanding. On the other hand, harmful to understanding LG implication is synecdoche illusion and the Horn Bias effect cast by the larger government levels (Tang & Huhe, 2016). In other words, citizens may perceive LG in the same light as they view national and state levels (synecdoche illusion). Further, if citizens perceive larger levels as untrustworthy, Horn Bias may influence them to distrust LGs. This bias, contrary to the more familiar Halo Effect, occurs when people perceive a negative characteristic in one condition, then they assume characteristics in other conditions are similarly negative. (Nicolau et al., 2020).

Theme Two: Public Service and Trust Link

Highlighted by Christensen et al. (2020) is the stark finding of public service delivery and its impact on LG public trust. In their survey of Japanese and Norwegian residents, they discovered some intriguing findings with LG implications. Their study was designed to explain the impact of general service satisfaction, political-cultural factors, and demographic factors on trust in LG. Using a large internet survey, over 3,100 Japanese and 1,030 Norwegian LG residents sampled from communities across both countries, responded over two years. Additionally, the sample was representative of each country in terms of gender, education, ages, income, and residence. Listed below are a few of the significant findings:

- The more satisfied with public services, the greater the trust;
- The smaller the municipality, the greater the trust;
- The longer the residency, the lower the trust;
- The more resident activity in the local community, the lower the trust;
- The older the resident, the lower the trust;
- The higher the educational level, the lower the trust.

From their findings, one may conclude that public service indeed exerts significant bearing on public trust in government. Further, this research suggests that public trust is the highest at the local level. Overall, these research results lend support for further study of the impact of public services in constituent trust in LG.

Further research indicates that the public's *recognition* and *evaluation* of LG services is a significant component in the variability of public trust (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). Considering public service's impact, investigation reveals that citizens do not always recognize which services are government-provided (Public Management Foundation, 1996). Given the vital link between government service and public trust, it is crucial for government officials to recognize this, considering that certain "services are considered as part of government and can thus be supposed to have an influence on the opinion of trust in government one has" (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001, p. 11). Moreover, in their recent article, scholars acknowledged this and published their findings after analyzing the bifurcated impacts of political versus administrative (services) on LG trust (Christensen et al., 2020). Their findings reveal that, by a considerable margin, services are the most influential factor of public trust in LG. Given the lack of available literature at the LG level and the poignancy of this research, these findings significantly influence the research questions. These questions, along with their underpinning rationale, are discussed near the end of this document.

Theme Three: Situational Perceptions

Another prominent theme in public trust literature is the notion of outside phenomenological interpretation. This interpretation involves drawing conclusions in one area based on perceptions of another, often unrelated phenomenon. When this is applied, views of LGs are highly influenced by factors having little to nothing to do with the LG environment. Three (3) factors emerge within the literature reflecting outside forces on constituent trust in LG: national political corruption and scandal, the economy, and political-socio-cultural (Nye, 1997).

Corruption and Scandal

Changes in public trust are linked with political factors, principal among them being corruption and scandal (Garment, 1991; Orren 1997). This outside force holds the primary attention of public trust scholarship. When conducting my review, corruption and scandal was the most significant perceived cause of declining public trust. Understanding this force is particularly important when also considering the potential national and state synecdoche effect cast on LG.

Economy

The economy, or more specifically, citizens' perception of the national economy, is associated with public trust (Citrin & Green 1986; Citrin & Luks 1998; Feldman 1983; Hetherington 1998; Miller & Borrelli 1991; cf. Lawrence 1997; Chang & Chu, 2006). In addition, Peters points to negative perceptions of the economy as a likely overriding driver of declining trust (1999). Uslaner (1999) discovers an association between the economy's performance and public trust, but only to the extent that constituents believe the government has influence. Noted in the review is that there is no known available literature that investigates the relationship, if any, between local economy and LG public trust.

Political-Socio-Cultural

The third emerging and overarching public trust factor is political-socio-cultural (PSC), the shared patterns and beliefs present in groups. Rising crime, child poverty and hunger, illiteracy, inclusivist initiatives, and social justice advancements are a few examples of PSC topics impacting public trust both positively and negatively (Mansbridge, 1997). Within the PSC view of influencing factors includes the more generic views on democracy, ideological mindsets and political-affiliation stances, and commitment in political movements (Ma & Yang, 2014). PSC forces, particularly social justice initiatives, exert powerful influence on all three levels of the United States government. Considering the recent and fervent rise in PSC forces, it is reasonable to conclude that there is no more appropriate time than now to seek public trust remedies.

Theme Four: Public Customer Service

As mentioned previously, examining all factors influencing public trust in LG is beyond the scope of this review. Accordingly, this section focuses on trust factors as elicited by public customer service. However, even customer service is too broad for this study. As Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2013) opine, interaction within government is analyzed at three levels: macro, meso, and micro. At the macro-level, the focus is on government institutions and the functioning of democracy at large. The meso-level focuses on policymaking. Lastly, the micro-level contemplates the effect of the delivery of service. It is at this micro-level that I concentrate in the following section.

Public customer service is a ubiquitously recognized but scantly researched domain. Widely understood is the notion that public services and their customer support efforts leave indelible impressions on a given constituency (Job, 2005). As revealed in a recent study, this support is the most significant predictor of public trust in LG by way of social trust. Addressing this finding, Job writes, "These government organizations are a visible part of the local community, and many people would interact with them on a regular basis" (p. 12). Given the proximity, accessibility, and visibility, one can conclude that LG services combined with customer service bears direct influence on public trust in LG organizations.

A significant advancement in public customer service knowledge is the performance measurement work by Bryna Sanger (2008). Her work highlights the lasting impact public services have on resident trust. She makes the case that, given this impact, efforts should be made to measure service performance. To this point, she states:

> Performance measurement and its public reporting…have the capability of restoring citizen trust in government by making its activities-service efforts and accomplishments-

> more transparent, open for public scrutiny, and demonstrative of real value for taxpayers. Performance measurement, therefore, can build political and civic support for public efforts and increased legitimacy of public authority (p. S71).

This notion of service's influence on public trust has significant support, including the seminal working during the Progressive Era (Ridley & Simon, 1938) and the more recent scholarly work of Moynihan (2008), Radin (2006), and Schick (2001). Collectively, their work empirically demonstrates that investment in the quantity, but even more importantly the quality, of services bears direct impact on public trust. Because of this, they argue, measurement of that impact is vital to taking any necessary corrective action.

Citizens value relationships with their government representatives. This assertion has its support (Christensen et al., 2020; Hendrix, 2019; Fredrickson, 1997) but particularly in Job's (2005) work on public trust origins. Amid efforts to reform trust in the Australian government, Job suggests that the public wants a social trust relationship with the national government. That relationship has generalizable implications for other government levels. Addressing this, Job (2005) opines:

> Most favor a rational view of trust based on people's evaluation of government performance in providing public goods. They argue that if people trust government to perform in their interests, they will generalize this experience and develop social trust, or trust in strangers (p. 1).

An implication of Job's assertion suggests that LGs must recognize that their relationship with the public is a function of public services meeting constituent's interest. Should this hold true, it follows that LG service quality holds significant influence on the relationship with the public and, therefore, the level of social trust.

The argument of public service's capability of influencing trust has its opponents. Yang and Holzer (2006) argue that this perceived influence is constructively challenging to demonstrate empirically though seemingly intuitive. They based this argument on the premise that defining and measuring government service performance is challenging to achieve. Significant to this challenge is the comprehension of constituent desires, whether they are expressed or not.

When LGs engage potential customers, it initiates the task of understanding the customer's expectations. In researching customer expectations, Reurink and Wagenheim (1991) state that success occurs when organizations "focuses on meeting customer expectations by doing the right things right the first time" (p. 264). Packaged within this statement is the notion of an ideal approach and process of meeting expectations. However, the challenge here is that the only part in the statement presumably understood by both LGs and residents is *the first time*, as this can be identified chronologically. Conversely, the *right thing* is more likely the area where incompatible perceptions come into play. To achieve resident satisfaction, LGs must both accurately understand and deliver the *right thing right* as perceived by the resident. Illustrating this, a government agency may ensure that it delivers outstanding service, yet the resident can still be left unsatisfied. In his work, Customer Service in Government, Eggers (n.d.) opines that this chasm between these two perceptions requires an understanding of how public satisfaction is measured. Undergirding this assertion, psychological research concludes that customer satisfaction is a function of perceived performance minus expectations (Maiser, 1985; Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001). Understanding that satisfactory performance is a matter of perspective, LGs ought to take a robust view of the expectations that influence customer perspectives.

Other researchers suggest that the link between public service and trust is spurious. Scholars concede that the performance-trust link appears logical but claim no causal link between the two constructs. Illustrating this, Vigoda-Gadot and Yuval (2003) opine that the performance-trust association includes a mediating variable called “managerial quality.” Thus, their argument should not be construed as denying the relationship. Instead, a proper understanding of the relationship recognizes a lack of direct causality between performance and trust. Other scholars agree that “a unilateral focus on performance will not be sufficient since perceptions and definitions of performance are not only created in government-citizen interactions but everyday citizen-citizen relations” (Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003, p. 909)” Marlowe opines this same sentiment and recommends that more precise knowledge is merited (2004).

Theme Five: Theory’s Role

Motivation-Hygiene Theory

Essential to this review of trust is the role that theory plays. In the customer service domain, Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory (MHT) garners significant attention (Jin-fu & Long, 2012). This theory was originally developed when researching workers’ reaction to their job. Specifically, Herzberg sought to understand factors that both motivated and demotivated workers in their place of employment. Herzberg’s theory, however, is not universally accepted. Dissenters challenge its validity arguing it fails to recognize substantial differences among individuals (Brenner et al., 1971), utilizes a flawed methodological approach (Grigaliunas & Wiener, 1974), and it misrepresents results (Whitsett & Winslow, 1967). Despite the dissention, this controversial theory has gained scholarly and practitioner repute with expanded domains such as customer service, embracing its core tenets (Sachau, 2007).

As this theory purports, motivators are conditions, inputs, or actions that, when present, function as an incentive for a particular action (Herzberg, 1966). Conversely, hygiene factors are those that, when present, go largely unnoticed but, when removed, typically lead to decreased motivation. This theoretical framework, operationally defined within government context, is called "grievance asymmetry" and works the same way with public services (Yang & Holzer, 2006, p. 115). For example, a LG lacking full-time fire/EMS services may motivate constituency trust by enacting a program to fund and staff a 24/7 emergency response program. Having once lacked this service, public trust is engendered by the perceived value of real-time life-saving availability. Conversely, to illustrate the hygiene factor, consider municipal refuse services. Residents typically do not proclaim satisfaction or elevated trust when the trash is picked up faithfully each week. However, one missed week usually results in some level of expressed dissatisfaction and can decrease trust indefinitely. Thus, both motivating and hygiene conditions interact with individual expectations in bearing impact on LG public trust.

Perception-Satisfaction Theory

Sharing some common elements with the MHT is the theory of perceptions-satisfaction management (Bouckaert, 1995). The interplay between perception and satisfaction is a critical dynamic in the evaluation of government trust. Buttressing this point is the research on the dissatisfaction of LG service delivery (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2013). Dissatisfaction, one might surmise, is the result of bad service administration, and thus, the onus is on the LG to improve the service delivery. While intuitively reasonable, research reflects that this is not necessarily the opinion of citizens (Council for Excellence in Government, 1999). Put another way, citizens may indeed factor other forces than just perceived poor service delivery. However, little research has focused on this idea and is deserving of more attention.

Receiving feedback on citizen perception of service responsibility is "…important, because it gives us information on images citizens have, and because this can give us information on how to design improvement strategies and perception management" (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2001, p. 29). This point is particularly germane when LGs solicit feedback via satisfaction surveys. When surveys are administered, citizens are invited to assess their service delivery experiences with a hypothetical ideal. In doing this, LGs may unwittingly create expectations as if perfect service delivery were possible. This dynamic leaves little room for considering the qualitative aspects in conflict with the service delivery. Researchers thus argue that expectations should not be the stand-alone criteria in satisfaction surveys, even though expectations are vital. In addition to expectations, researchers imply that gaps, including those of perceptions, should be integrated into the survey data analysis. Zeithaml et al., (1990) identified gaps associated within the LG realm to include:

- expected service vs. LG perception of citizen expectation
- service quality specifications vs. LG perceptions of citizen expectation
- service delivery vs. service quality specification
- external communication to citizen vs. service delivery and
- expected service vs. perceived service

These gaps, in lending support to the value of service delivery quality, speak to the complexity of understanding and satisfying the unique expectations of the public. Considering this value and complexity, this point is further addressed in a later section.

Review of Local Government Environment

Literature peering into LG trust dynamics is limited and what is available generally focuses on a) perceptions of transparency, b) LG values, and c) proximity to constituents.

Referencing transparency, Piotrowski and Van Ryzin (2007) provide pioneering insight into factors influencing resident's perception of government openness. They imply that perceptions of transparency suggest a strong association with public trust. Using an in-depth survey of a sample of over 1,800 residents, they noted several factors driving the public's assessment of transparency. Those factors include age, political ideology, confidence in government leaders, frequency of government interaction, and perceptions of lacking government access. Another noteworthy finding was that the more confidence constituents have in local officials, the less they are interested in fiscal, principled, and good government transparency. In other words, the more public trust in LG representatives, the less the public is concerned that their LG is responsible, open, and transparent.

LG values is another topic taken up by researchers. One of the earlier forays into LG theory and values includes a seminal conference on the then-nascent movement to decentralize oversight and service delivery from the state to local levels (Sharpe, 1970). Here, Sharpe lays out the values underpinning the public preference for local governance as a) enhanced liberty, b) efficient services, and c) improved participation. Andrew and Goldsmith (1998) add to the values discussion arguing the need for LGs to reevaluate its governance due to the new realities of rapidly changing technology, increased economic independence, widening social integration, and increased law enforcement demands.

Proximity is another factor drawing increased scholarly interest. Namely, scholars argue the position that the closer the public is to LG representatives, the greater the influence on public trust. Generally understood, LG, due to its proximity to the resident, is the most direct deliverer of service within all types of governments (Hendrix, 2019). While the number of programs and services provided by LGs pale in comparison to those of the state and federal, LGs typically provide tailored services to the demands of the local electorate. Additionally, the local decision-makers are routinely more accessible to residents and, thus, are subject to more personal input and feedback. Supporting this point is the extensive work by Bryna Sanger (2008). In her work examining performance measures at the local level, she writes:

> We would expect cities and counties to do better in measuring performance, consulting with and reporting to citizens about it, and using it to manage. Cities and counties provide citizens more visible services that they understand and that impact their daily lives. Their measurement is technically easier than it is for many state functions, and citizens are more likely to hold local officials accountable for direct service delivery (p. S72).

This proximity of exchange between decision-makers and the public provides for characteristically tailored service delivery. Difficulties occur when those providing public services fail to see them as more than tangible and transactional.

Further supporting the proximity argument, Fredrickson (1997) proffers what is called the *paradox of distance*. This paradox is described as a phenomenon "whereby people trust politicians and civil servants who are close to them because they have good experiences with them while thinking that the ones further away are lazy, dishonest, incompetent, and so on, which is rather common in many Western countries" (Christensen et al., 2020, p. 5). By extension, this perspective suggests that trust tends to improve when the public and LG are close in proximity, whether that reflects distance, relationship, or accessibility.

Assumed within the notion of proximity is the construct of relational trust (Christensen et al., 2020; Hendrix, 2019; Fredrickson, 1997; Job, 2005). One of the foremost authors on public trust, Robert Putnam, argues that this proximity can facilitate strong civic engagement (Job, 2005). Applying social capital theory, Putnam says this close engagement then leads to social trust, a key factor in increased government effectiveness, and by extension, public trust (Putnam, 1993 & 2000). However, Job (2005), an opponent of this conclusion, says that civic engagement, by itself, does not necessarily translate into public trust. Instead, her findings suggest that relational trust, with its driving environmental influences of family and one's personal circle, is the moderating factor bridging social trust with public trust in government.

It should be noted that this paradox of distance has a further counterargument. Opponents propose that the exact opposite dynamic is at play in the proximity-trust relationship. They say that the public finds it easier to trust institutions, representatives, and services that are distant (Ma & Christensen, 2019). Proximity, Ma and Christensen (2019) suggest, is more likely to reflect incompetence and unjust allocation of public services or create public disgrace. This noteworthy perspective of proximity assumes that negative government performance exerts a more significant influence on public trust than positive interactions.

Review of Customer Service Domain

Due to the similarities of customer service at large and the service mission of local government, the literature review is extended into the customer service field of study. Already discussed is the literature proposing that constituents desire relational trust with their respective governments and that the more proximate the government, the greater the impact on and variability of public trust. Unlike the topic of LG public trust, there has been a significant amount of research in the customer service domain. Specifically, the customer service literature documents the central importance of trust in securing and holding satisfactory provider-customer relationships (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Doney & Cannon, 1997; Dorsch, Swanson, & Kelly, 1998). The idea that trust and good relationships are related is not a modern convention, however.

Long recognized in the behavioral sciences, namely psychology and social sciences, is the strong positive correlation between quality relationships and trust. As such, customer service scholars recognize this linkage by focusing their research on the effect of an individual representative's characteristics on establishing trust (Coulter & Coulter, 2002). Characteristics receiving substantial literature attention include a) competence, b) ability to tailor-fit solutions, c) promptness, d) reliability, e) empathy, f) politeness, and g) perceived similarity between representative and customer (Moorman et al., 1993). These characteristics have apparent anecdotal value to the service-minded local government (Burke, 2018). Additionally, these attributes have significant support from the social and organizational psychology fields as antecedents, or predictors, of trust (Coulter & Coulter, 2002; Mishra, 1995). So powerful are these elements that they collectively explain the majority of trustworthiness as a phenomenon (Mayer et al., 1995).

Of course, the proposition of individual characteristics impacting trust has its opponents. Whereas none of the opposing literature addressed characteristics as a whole, a few of them parse out concerns of validity and a lack of relationship predictability. Included concerns are the negative relationship between empathy and trust (Moorman et al., 1993), no relationship between empathy and long-term relationship orientation (Ganesan, 1994), and no relationship between similarity and relationship quality (Crosby et al., 1990). Coulter and Coulter (2002) resolve this opposing tension suggesting that the mixed results may be a function of factors like different dependent measures, varying operationalizing of independent and dependent variables, and differing lengths of interacting time between the customer and the service provider. Though Coulter and Coulter add significant understanding to trust knowledge base determinants, their work only examined the customer side. Their argument is discussed in the following section, with attention given to a) the powerful implications and b) the close association between the customer service field and the service-mission LG.

Viewing LG as a service provider allows access to expanded academic support from other fields wherein service quality measurement, customer expectation, customer satisfaction, and customer trust are linked. Given that scholars are divided on the assertion that customer satisfaction is inextricably tied to trust, Dahiyat et al. (2011) offer a cogent defense for the sequential chain reaction from service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1994) to response-based satisfaction (Rust & Oliver, 1994; Lai, Griffin, & Babin, 2008) to positive behavioral intentions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Brady & Robertson, 2001) to shaping customer confidence (Yieh, Chiao, & Chiu, 2007) to ultimately customer trust (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Hsieh & Hang, 2004; Yieh et al., 2007). Researchers offer a succinct encapsulation of this process, stating, “the better the perceived quality of service, the more likely the customer is to gain confidence in that organization, and the more trusting s/he becomes of the service provider” (Yieh et al., 2007, p. 271). Scholars extend this argument further, deducing that given the inherent relationship between customer satisfaction and trust, the greater the service satisfaction, the more probable customers will trust both the service organization and the service personnel (Dahiyat et al., 2011). Therefore, service organizations, and by implication LGs, by targeting dependable customer satisfaction, are more likely to avert uncertainties, variations, and unnecessary risks in the service provider/customer relationship, thereby strengthening customer trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Boersma et al., 2003; Aydin & Özer, 2005).

Moderating Impact of Length of Relationship

Noted previously, residents desire trusting relationships with their respective LG. Given this, researchers have examined that another variable, length of relationship, has a moderating effect on trust factors (Coulter & Coulter, 2002; Moorman et al., 1993; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). More specifically, Crosby et al. (1990) hypothesize that relationships develop over time as customers gain familiarity with their service providers. Coulter and Coulter (2002) buttress this notion with the following statement: “The more encounters one has with his/her service representative, the more information is accumulated about that service rep, and the more knowledge is gained about a particular service industry” (p. 38).

Scholars also indicate that this increased knowledge, in the form of familiarity, mitigates customer perceptions of risk thereby encouraging a trusting relationship (Keveaney, 1995). Again, Coulter and Coulter (2002) affirm this notion stating, “Uncertainty (and hence risk) is reduced as knowledge is gained with repeat exposure to the service supplier over time” (p. 36). With the mission to deliver public services, LGs are operationally, and at the core, service providers. Having thus established this, the findings described here are, by extension, deemed relevant within the LG domain. Accordingly, length of relationship within the private sector is akin to length of residency within the LG service provider environment.

The Case for Research Questions

Though literature focused specifically within a LG context is scant, this review reveals ample research based on multiple fields of study by which an informed research question is developed. In the following section, the overarching research question is presented along with a supporting rationale.

Given the precipitous decline in public trust and the burgeoning negative implications for

LGs, the following research question is set forth: *What is the impact of local government service factors on public trust?*

Examining this question includes investigating the underpinning dynamics affecting the perceived quality of service received and the strength of relationship between the LG and its constituents. Discussed earlier, evidence indicates that there are several focal points that shed light on these dynamics (Coulter & Coulter, 2002). Those points serve as the framework for the sub-questions and associated hypotheses.

Given the proximity between the LG and its residents, the public feels a direct, practical, and interpersonal impact of services delivered. As such, the public is likely to identify with a close ownership of the competence, tailor-fitness, promptness, and reliability of public services. Therefore, related sub-research questions and hypotheses are as follows:

Sub-Research Question 1: Does the public's perceived competence of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?

> *H_1: Public trust in LG is positively related with residents' affirmative perception of LG competent public services.*

Sub-Research Question 2: Does the public's perception of LG's ability to customize public service solutions influence public trust?

> *H_2: Public trust in LG is positively related with residents' affirmative perception of LG ability to customize public service solutions.*

Sub-Research Question 3: Does the public's perceived promptness of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?

> *H_3: Public trust in LG is positively related with residents' affirmative perception of LG prompt public services.*

Sub-Research Question 4: Does the public's perceived reliability of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?

H_4: Public trust in LG is positively related with residents' affirmative perception of LG public services reliability.

In addition to the implications of proximity, the public views the link between them and government as relational (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Brady & Robertson, 2001; Christensen et al., 2020; Hendrix, 2019; Fredrickson, 1997; Job, 2005). This relationship is impacted not only by the practical utility of services delivered, but also the behavioral manner in which they are offered. Given the evidence of service provider behavior and trust (Dahiyat et al., 2011), related sub-research questions and hypotheses are as follows:

Sub-Research Question 5: Does the public's perceived compassion of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?

H_5: Public trust in LG is positively related with residents' affirmative perception of LG compassionate public service delivery.

Sub-Research Question 6: Does the public's perceived civility of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?

H_6: Public trust in LG is positively related with residents' affirmative perception of LG civil public service delivery.

As previously discussed, seminal research in the service provider domain indicate that length of relationship has as an impact on the antecedents of customer trust. With the nexus between the service provider domain and the service-centric mission of LG, a similar dynamic is expected to occur between the LG and the pertaining local residents, as measured by constituent length of residency. Additionally, service-centric LGs are expected to continuously improve service quality and manner of delivery over time (Sanger, 2008). It is expected, therefore, that this continual improvement will exert influence on constituent trust over time. Lastly, the study by Coulter and Coulter (2008) found that the trust and length of relationship hypotheses were supported. Considering these points, the sub-research questions and hypotheses are as follows:

Sub-Research Question 7: Does the public's length of residency within the LG have an impact on the public trust in their LG?

$H_{7(a)}$: The effect of resident perceptions of LG competence on trust will increase as length of residency increases;

$H_{7(b)}$: The effect of resident perceptions of LG customization on trust will increase as length of residency increases;

$H_{7(c)}$: The effect of resident perceptions of LG reliability on trust will increase as length of residency increases;

$H_{7(d)}$: The effect of resident perceptions of LG promptness on trust will increase as length of residency increases;

$H_{7(e)}$: The effect of resident perceptions of LG representative compassion on trust will increase as length of residency increases;

$H_{7(f)}$: The effect of resident perceptions of LG representative civility on trust will increase as length of residency increases.

Summary

Public trust in government is worthy of inquiry. There is extensive literature showing that a problem exists; but that is a problem poorly understood. This review, with the concluding research questions, reflects the intent to understand a potential source of some of the problems related to trust in government, focused on the local level. Given the limited literature focused on trust with a LG concentration, this review addresses this void by generalizing from research focused on a) higher government levels and b) other scholarly domains with shared trust and relationship concerns. Parlaying that knowledge into researching factors affecting LG constituent trust can serve as foundational scholarship for further inquiry. Moreover, scholarly insight reveals that length of relationship (i.e., residency) has a significant and moderating influence on customer (resident) trust factors. Given that investigation into LG trust factors is in its infancy, researching the direct exchanges with LG constituents, namely public service, is deemed worthy of the next steps of inquiry.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH DESIGN

Considering the nascency of investigation into the relationship between public trust factors and LG, there are few extant research projects from which to learn when deciding on a research methodology. Despite being a logical candidate for a qualitative approach, I deemed this project more conducive for quantifying relationships between public trust factors and LG. The idea, therefore, is that this under-researched topic is so expansive that it is deemed wise to begin with a methodology aimed at establishing fundamental associations before plumbing the depths too far. Understandably, many scholars seek what Bamberger and Ang (2016) call "big D" discoveries (p. 1). Yet, in their argument for using quantitative methodologies in research, Bamberger and Ang (2016) state the:

> …incremental, data-driven insights (i.e., discoveries with a small "d") are no less significant than the big leaps (i.e., Discoveries with a big "D"). Indeed, what may appear to be "sudden," big leaps may, in actuality, emerge from a stream of smaller, incremental advances (Study 1, Study 2, etc.…) as investigators identify an interesting anomaly and then use empirical observation to "tweak" it and learn more about its properties and effects (p. 2).

An analytical, objective, and measurement-focused approach seems appropriate due to little existing scholarly comprehension of service factors affecting LG public trust.

Further, this dissertation topic is fitted with a quantitative approach considering that "statistical analyses provide scholars with a basis for assessing the degree to the findings accurately and reliably reflect what the authors say they do, and for determining the degree to which the findings may be generalizable to similar phenomenon or different contexts" (Bamberger & Ang, 2016, p. 2). In keeping with these descriptions, I endeavor to understand the degree to which certain public service factors impact constituents and their trust in the LG body.

The rest of this chapter describes the structure and process of the study, including details of the research (a) design, (b) methodology, (c) population and sample, (d) survey instrument, (e) data collection, and (f) data analysis. This section concludes with an evaluation of the study's reliability and validity analysis.

Research Methodology

The analytical and measurement-centricity of this dissertation design was established in the field of quantitative research. Two scholars opined on the value of quantitative methodologies: "Quantitative techniques are particularly strong at studying large groups of people and generalizing from the sample being studied to broader groups beyond that sample" (Holton & Burnett, 2005, p. 30). Within a quantitative context, this nonexperimental study employed a correlational approach (Sriram, 2017). As described by Holton and Burnett (2005), this approach is characterized by seeking "to determine relationships among two or more variables without necessarily inferring causality" (p. 31). By understanding the correlation between LG public service delivery and the perceived impact on residents, scholars, practitioners, and LG officials will be better equipped to directly moderate public trust at the closest level. Thus, a quantitative methodology is deemed aptly suited for this project.

Another goal of using a quantitative approach is the hope of advancing theory from the research (Crosbie-Burnett, et al., 2005). Researchers can better understand whether the overriding proposed theory has substantive support by testing hypotheses. When hypotheses are supported, credence for the proposed theory is advanced and contribution to knowledge development is generated. Research design scholars espouse this when they write:

> Quantitative methods are generally used to construct theory or to test theory. In constructing a theory, the researcher collects data on a range of observable or measurable variables and then constructs a theory that best explains the data (de Vaus, 2013). This type of analysis involves looking for patterns between the data. In theory testing, the researcher has an existing theory they are testing using data. The variables measured are put into a model, which is then tested to see if the data fit the model (de Vaus, 2013). If the data do not fit the model, a new theory is constructed (Mat Roni et al., 2019, p. 11).

Most importantly, quantitative research, with its basis steeped in the scientific method (Haase & Myers, 1988), offers the opportunity to determine not just whether relationships exist, but when relationships are discovered, to measure the statistical strength of them as well as potential moderating factors. When implemented well, this research will lay the ground for future, more exploratory and deeper investigations into understanding the nuances of public trust factors. Accordingly, having a robust diagnostic evaluation via a quantitative approach will pave the way for more inductive inquiry; an approach better suited for a qualitative design (1988).

In addition to employing an overarching quantitative methodology, this project utilized a convenience sampling intended to garner feedback from Whitehouse, Ohio residents 18 years of age or older. As a nonprobability sampling process, this method does not seek randomization. Furthermore, design elements were selected to ensure that sample participants meet research population characteristics (Fowler, 2014).

A previously validated survey informed this research as a means for dependable data gathering on the investigated variables. The use of a pre-existing and scholarly-confirmed instrument facilitated reliability within the results using pre-established terms and validated measurements (Creswell, 2015). Further, the collection of survey data from a wide-spread population can be accomplished at a reasonably low cost. Moreover, survey data collection is conducive for organizing data sets, which are particularly useful in analyzing and interpreting descriptive and inferential statistics (Creswell, 2015).

Lastly, descriptive and inferential statistics were significant considerations in the data collection process (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). The descriptive statistics analysis allowed for contextual and relational understanding of variable dynamics and phenomena by displaying and interpreting summary statistics like percentages, means, standard deviations, and correlations. (Creswell, 2015; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). In addition, inferential statistics involved analysis of variable associations and comparisons that are integral in forming hypotheses and related statistical assessments (Creswell, 2015; Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

Population and Sample

The target population were residents of Whitehouse, Ohio, a town of approximately 5,000 residents in Northwest Ohio. Whitehouse is a town generally representative of many other Midwestern American municipalities, with residents holding high expectations of LGs and their respective public services (Dixon, 2021). Demographical information (World Population Review, 2021) include the following statistics:

- Median resident age is 40.1 years
- 51% female, 49% male
- Mean household income is $109,178
- Poverty rate is 5.89%
- 98.04% are Caucasian

- 41.3% have bachelor's or graduate degrees
- Whitehouse jurisdictional land mass is 4.3 square miles

Though smaller in geography and population, its governing form matches that of state, federal, and larger city governments by embodying the three branches of government: legislative (Village Council), judicial (Municipal Court), and executive (Mayor). From a practical perspective, it is also the town where the principal investigator grew up and now serves as the Village Administrator. This relationship serves as a personal impetus for employing an action research initiative through this project. Whereas no other municipality has undergone a trust factor study, Whitehouse is deemed a viable population that will generalize to other similar communities.

Instrument

The instrument chosen to measure public trust was from the work of Coulter and Coulter (2002), whose research centers on the impact of services delivered (quality and personal manner of delivery) on customer trust. Specifically, this instrument was developed from research within the private sector (insurance environment), whose targets were service-providing small businesses. As described earlier, no research thus far has investigated the antecedents of trust in the local environment. Additionally, scholarship has paid little to no attention to other constructs related to trust (e.g., satisfaction, confidence, and loyalty) within the LG domain. Therefore, although the scale stems from the private sector, the reality of the similarity between the service provider domain and the service-centric LG sphere is deemed a compelling rationale for usage in this study. From an academic perspective, the original Coulter and Coulter (2002) manuscript has been cited 860 times per Google Scholar (accessed 1/19/2022). After scrutinizing the scale, its academic rigor, and the generalizable application, this scale, with its tight focus on service delivery's impact on customer trust, was selected for this study.

The preface of the survey included three demographic questions. Specifically, this was done to obtain data on respondent age, gender, and length of residency. The remainder of the survey included a slightly modified version of the Offer- and Person-Related Trust (OPRT) scale by Coulter & Coulter. This instrument has been extensively used across several scholarly domains and reflects strong evidence of reliability, with Cronbach's alpha range of 0.85 to 0.96 (scale's alpha range is depicted in Appendix C). This scale consists of 22 items, with each item employing a 10-point Likert reply range and measures the level of trust by evaluating seven antecedent variables.

Another reason for using this instrument is the nexus between LG services to the customer (Boersma et al., 2003; Aydin & Özer, 2005). Given the assessment that LGs are, if nothing else, service providers at heart (Burke, 2018), a scale was sought that could be cross-utilized within a LG context. Upon deeper investigation, this scale has been cited in diverse contexts such as website management (Flavián, et al., 2006), higher education (Schlesinger et al., 2017), branding (Schmid & Huber, 2019), and supply chain management (Hoejmose et al., 2013), to name a few. To adapt to the LG context, scale items needed only slight language modification to reflect a LG setting. As such, each question that began with, "My service provider…" was modified to reflect "My local government service provider…"

The scale was slightly modified for the purpose of this research. The original scale included three items addressing the variable representative similarity. This factor addresses the potential impact that shared beliefs and perspectives, and similar mannerisms may have on trust in service providers. This factor was removed due to concern that government/resident interaction and the potential for elevated political sensitivity would elevate political environment bias and thus, harmfully and unnecessarily influence data responses (Carmines & Nassar, 2021; Goodwin & Jasper, 1999; Jerit & Barabas, 2012).

Data Collection and Procedures

Utilizing explanatory and descriptive statistical interpretation, this nonexperimental research design focused on correlational results. The study applied correlational statistics to determine the relationships between seven service factors and reported public trust. Supported by the Qualtrics XM platform, an online survey was constructed. Through this survey, data were gathered concerning participants' assessment of Whitehouse's public services on their reported level of public trust.

Per this study, sample participants (residents) were operationally defined as *individuals 18 years or older who make their primary domicile within the legal boundaries of Whitehouse, Ohio.* Participants were chosen from the population using the master utility account list provided by the Whitehouse Utilities Department. That file, with an initial listing of 1,862 addresses, was reviewed for duplicate recipients and for addresses outside Whitehouse jurisdictional boundaries. In total, 1,713 households were sent invitations via U.S. Postal Service to participate in the online convenience sample survey. In the first and second week after mailing the invitation, two follow-up social media (Facebook and Instagram) notices and an email were sent via the Village office inviting Whitehouse residents to participate.

The invitation expressly extended an invitation to anyone within the household meeting the criteria to participate. As such, it was assumed that some households included more than one response due to multiple eligible participants living within the same household. This was deemed acceptable given the desire to gather as wide of a sample base as possible.

In the invitation, participants were provided a link to access the online survey. Once accessing the Qualtrics XM survey portal, participants were given a) a brief description of the research's purpose, b) information on the data collection process, c) assurance of respondent anonymity, and d) a summary of the rights and protections afforded to them. Participants were then informed that in order to proceed with the survey, they must provide their consent by indicating agreement to the terms of the informed consent. The instructions explained that clicking an "I agree" button and completing the survey indicates respondent consent.

On the next page of the survey, participants were given a brief explanation describing Whitehouse as a service provider (e.g., providing police/fire protection, water and sewer utilities, street plowing, and refuse collection). This was done to help ensure participants recognize the service provider role that a LG, and specifically Whitehouse, plays in a community. After reading this explanation, participants were then permitted to submit responses to three demographic questions and the 22 items contained in the modified Coulter and Coulter (2002) instrument.

Data collection took place in January of 2022. All participant data were collected conditioned on expressed permission from eligible participants and in conformity with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines. The following criteria was used to select the participants in the study: (1) Village of Whitehouse resident, and (2), 18 years or older.

Upon accessing the survey (Appendix B), residents were asked the following demographic questions:

- What is your age in years?
- What is your gender?
- How long have you been a resident of the Village of Whitehouse?

It was anticipated that response patterns discerned demographic evaluation (e.g., high vs low response rate by sub-groups) would stimulate interest for further research on this or related topics. Moreover, this information will be useful in forming broader inferences and will be discussed further in the Discussion chapter.

It is important to highlight that participation was voluntary. This was conspicuously noted in the a) survey invitation letter, b) informed consent form, and c) the survey itself. Prospective respondents were encouraged to participate, but only to the extent they felt sufficiently comfortable in doing so.

This collective effort generated 262 survey responses. After reviewing these responses, 55 of them were found to be significantly incomplete and deemed unusable for analysis. The remaining 207 responses, representing a 12.0% sample response rate, were used for the analysis. Among those survey responses, there were few missing responses to the survey questions. Those missing values were subsequently addressed via pairwise deletion.

Data Analysis

The collected survey data were evaluated with IBM's SPSS version 28.0 software package. This evaluation commenced with the generation of descriptive statistics. This was done to gain insights into the population and variables measured. Shown in Table 3 and Table 4 are statistics used to address central tendency (including means, sample size, and percentages) as well as the standard deviations of variables. Additionally, reliability testing was applied to the variables using Cronbach's alpha assessment.

Consideration of Reliability

To assess reliability, Pearson product moment correlations and Cronbach's alphas were calculated based on the unweighted sum of the items. Specifically, these tools were used to test for multicollinearity (variable independence) and scale internal consistency. When reviewing Pearson's correlations among predicter variables, concern of acceptable variable independence is signaled when correlations exceed .80 (Farrar & Glauber, 1967). In keeping with expert recommendations, scale item reliability was supported with Cronbach alpha scores of .7 or greater (Cronbach, 1951; Nunnally, 1978).

Test results used to measure the reliability among the measures are provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Reliability Among Measures

Variable	Scale Items	Reliability
Trust	My service provider is trustworthy;	α = .977
Trust	My service provider keeps my dealings confidential;	
Trust	My service provider has a great deal of integrity;	
Trust	My service provider brings high standards to work;	
Trust	My service provider is a person with principles	

Compassion	My service provider is caring;	α = .967
Compassion	My service provider is warm;	
Compassion	My service provider is friendly	
Civility	My service provider is polite;	α = .986
Civility	My service provider treats me with respect;	
Civility	My service provider is courteous	
Competence	My service provider is an expert in his/her field;	α = .961
Competence	My service provider is experienced in this business	
Reliability	My service provider provides promised services;	α = .954
Reliability	My service provider is dependable	
Promptness	My service provider deals promptly with my needs;	α = .973
Promptness	My service provider deals in a timely manner;	
Promptness	My service provider is punctual	
Customization	My service provider offers alternatives for my needs;	α = .965
Customization	My service provider provides customized services;	

Customization	My service provider help define my particular needs	

Note. All items were ten-point Likert scales

Consideration of Validity

Analysis of collected data continued with procedures to determine model validity. Particularly, the seven model variables were analyzed for evidence of supporting and discriminant validity. By comparing correlations between the independent and dependent variables (see Table 6), it was determined that all were positively related to each other. The strength of relationship was consistent with construct expectations via supporting and discriminant validity analysis. For example, H_1 hypothesized that public trust in LG is positively related to residents' affirmative perception of LG competent public services. Construct validity expects that positive experiences with competent services would have a positive bearing on trust (Lee, 2004). Conversely, discriminant validity would expect that measurements that are not meant to be related are in fact found unrelated (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). As is discussed further in the next chapter, the positive predictor and outcome correlations noted in Table XX support construct validity.

In evaluating discriminate validity, none of the measurements expected to be negative were demonstrated in the results. For example, it was predicted that intercorrelations between competence and other predictor variables would be positive. Moreover, none of the relationships in the correlations table were negative, thus supporting discriminant validity. Combined, this evidence supports both validity expectations, thereby adding credibility to the study.

Operational Definitions of Variables

Considering a more in-depth evaluation, the instrument contained seven variables with a total of 22 questions. Operational definitions of the variables included in this study were drawn from past scholarship (e.g., Cleary & Stokes, 2006; Kim, 2005; Lindquist & Eichbaum, 2016; Ocampo et al., 2019; Parasuramet et al., 1985; Perry, 1997; Surprenant and Solomon, 1987; Thomas, 1998; Timonen et al., 2016; Van Oort, 2011; Wallace Ingraham & Getha-Taylor, 2005). The following is a list of those dimensions measured by the instrument.

Competence: This facet is operationalized as the level to which constituents perceive LG representatives as holding sufficient knowledge, skills, and abilities to deliver fundamental public services (Wallace Ingraham & Getha-Taylor, 2005). An example of a competence item includes a LG employee successfully troubleshooting a resident's sewer line obstruction.

Reliability: This refers to the delivery of public services in a manner deemed dependable by the public (Van Oort, 2011). An example includes consistent provision of clean, safe, and drinkable municipal water.

Promptness: This reflects the timely provision of public services, as determined by the public (Ocampo et al., 2019). An example of promptness includes quick and efficient building permit processing.

Customization: Customization is defined as the LG representative's ability to adjust and tailor-fit public services to the needs of the resident (Timonen et al., 2016). An example of this includes a planning official offering a creative, customer-fit solution to a land development challenge.

Civility: This refers to the degree to which LG representatives are perceived as courteous and considerate (Lindquist & Eichbaum, 2016). An example of this includes a police officer's kind demeanor and openness when attending to a resident a traffic stop.

Compassion: Compassion reflects the degree to which the public perceives LG representatives as possessing a warm, approachable, and caring disposition (Perry, 1997). An example of this includes an office clerk's empathetic and benevolent treatment of a resident asking for assistance with an overdue utility bill.

Public Trust: This refers to the extent to which citizens have confidence in public institutions to operate in the best interests of society and its constituents (Cleary & Stokes, 2006; Kim, 2005; Thomas, 1998).

Length of Residency*:* The is defined as the total time a resident made his/her primary domicile within the LG's jurisdictional boundaries. This definition is significantly informed by the length of relationship moderating interaction demonstrated by Coulter and Coulter (2002).

In the process of gathering data on these variables, each question employed a 10-point Likert measurement, as used in the original Coulter and Coulter effort. Measurement for the six predictor variables and the one dependent variable were all measured on their normal numerical values. The three demographic variables were each coded to allow for statistical evaluations. Those variables and associated dummy codes are reflected in Table 2.

Table 2

Coding for Demographic Variables

Variable	Dummy Code
Gender: Female	1
Gender: Male	2
Age (years): 18-29	1
Age (years): 30-39	2
Age (years): 40-49	3
Age (years): 50-59	4
Age (years): 60+	5
Length of Residency (years): 0-9	1
Length of Residency (years): 10-19	2
Length of Residency (years): 20-29	3
Length of Residency (years): 30-39	4
Length of Residency (years): 40+	5

Each of the seven hypotheses were examined using Pearson correlation and hierarchical regression, a combined approach often used in quantitative studies (Creswell, 2015; Rovai et al., 2014). The Pearson correlation evaluation, tested at a significance of $p < .01$, revealed the statistical relationship between the predictor variables (i.e., customization, competence, reliability, promptness, compassion, and politeness) and the dependent variable (i.e., trust). With this basis, it followed that evidence supporting H_1, H_2, H_3, H_4, H_5, and H_6 should reflect positive slopes between predictor and dependent variables, assuming significance was accomplished.

In testing for the moderating interaction ($H_{7(a-f)}$), hierarchical regression testing was applied. Step One of this process called for entering in the main effect for the predictor variables. In Step Two, the LOR variable was added. This step included evaluating the direction and strength of relationship between each of the predictor variables (main effect) and the outcome variable. This test also evaluated for significance, which is reflected in a *p-value* less than or equal to .05. Step Three involved testing for the moderating effect of LOR. Specifically, the interaction between the main effect for trust antecedents (independent variables) with LOR was added. For the six moderation tests, each predictor variable was separately multiplied by the hypothesized moderating effect, LOR. Like the first step, an evaluation of significance via the *p-value* was conducted to test whether the change in R^2 was significant as compared to the second step. However, an affirmative test for significance only provides statistical evidence that LOR has a moderating impact. To evaluate the effect on each tested relationship's direction and strength, further analysis was warranted. Accordingly, an inquiry of slope (reflecting direction and strength) and coefficient of determination (amount of variation explained) both before and after the interaction test was needed. Evidence supporting the moderation hypotheses should include statistically significant increased R^2 values as well as positive slopes.

The final step in this process was to graphically depict the results of the moderation test. This depiction involved comparing the pre-interaction plot with that of the post-interaction. Graphical representation of a discovered moderation effect would include pre- and post-moderation plots of differing angles. These results and representations are included in the next chapter.

Summary

The chapter described the overall design, structure, and process of the research. More specifically, the chapter provided a rationale for employing a quantitative methodology with a focus on testing a Pearson correlational angle and hierarchical regression. In addition, an overview was provided on the study's population (Whitehouse, Ohio) and sample (respondents to the survey) as well as a summary of the ORPR instrument used. Next, this chapter devoted attention to describing the specific steps taken in administrating the survey and the subsequent data collection. Results of the preliminary data analysis focused on reliability and validity measures. Outcomes of these measures indicated strong evidence of reliability but also significant concern over the potential presence of multicollinearity. Finally, this chapter provided operationalized definitions of the variables utilized in this study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to examine potential sources of public trust challenges within the LG domain. Emerging from the literature review, the overarching research question, *What is the impact of local government service factors on public trust,* was divided into seven sub-research questions. These questions resulted in 12 individual hypotheses. The sub-research questions and attending hypotheses sought to examine six explanatory variables as to whether predicting relationships with public trust existed and, if so, to what extent. Additionally, the research tested for the existence of a moderating interaction of the variable LOR with those relationships. This chapter presents the data analysis and results of the hypotheses testing.

Collection of data was obtained from a convenience sample of residents whose participation eligibility included individuals who a) are 18 years or older and b) make their primary domicile within the legal boundaries of Whitehouse, Ohio. Participants were chosen from the population using addresses on file with the Whitehouse Utilities Department. In total, 1,862 addresses were initially gathered. Accounts were subsequently reviewed for duplicate account holders and for accounts with addresses outside Whitehouse municipal limits. This step discovered 134 duplications or accounts outside Village limits. 1,728 (1,862 minus 134) households were then sent an invitation letter to take part in an online survey. Fifteen of those letters were subsequently returned due to being undeliverable by the mail carrier. Ultimately, 1,713 (1,728 minus 15) households received the invitation. After sending the invitations, two social media notices were sent via Whitehouse's official Meta Messenger and Instagram accounts reminding them of the survey invitation. Additionally, email notices were sent to Whitehouse residents who had previously signed up to receive general Village updates. A total of 985 resident email accounts received a survey reminder.

The initial goal was to collect between 150 and 200 sample responses. The procedures and collective effort resulted in 262 initial survey responses. Fifty-five of those responses were subsequently tested to determine if they were substantially incomplete. The metric used to determine substantial incompletion was 10% or greater missing survey items per response (Bennett, 2001). Given that participants were asked a total of 22 scale questions, responses with three or more blanks were removed from research consideration. With that rubric applied, all 55 subsequently tested responses were deemed substantially incomplete. Thus, 207 responses were ultimately included in this research. This represented a 12.0% response rate, which considering the methodology utilized, is an acceptable rate (Fox et al., 1988).

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic results for the sample responses are presented in Table 3. Of the 207 respondents, 46% (n = 95) were female and 54% (n = 112) were male. These results are representative of the Whitehouse population estimate per the 2020 Census (Census Reporter, 2022). Also, 50% (n = 100) were 60 years of age or older. The next highest grouping included the age range 50-59 (21%, n = 44) followed by the ranges 40-49 (15%, n = 32), 30-39 (13%, n = 26), and 18-29 (1%, n = 2). Thus, at 71% (50% + 21%), individuals 50 years of age and older represented most of the research respondents. By comparison, the 2020 Census, administered approximately 16 months prior to this study's data collection, reported the following age range demographics:

- 0-9 (12%)
- 10-19 (17%)
- 20-29 (5%)
- 30-39 (15%)

- 40-49 (12%)
- 50+ (39%)

Based on this comparison, it appears that sample age ranges 30-39 and 40-49 were representative of the local population. Conversely, as a percentage of total responses, sample responses for the age ranges 50+ and 18-29 were significantly higher and lower, respectively, than the reported Whitehouse population. Considering this, the age range response deviations from the estimated population is a significant point and is discussed later in the study.

Table 3

Demographic Data of Study Sample

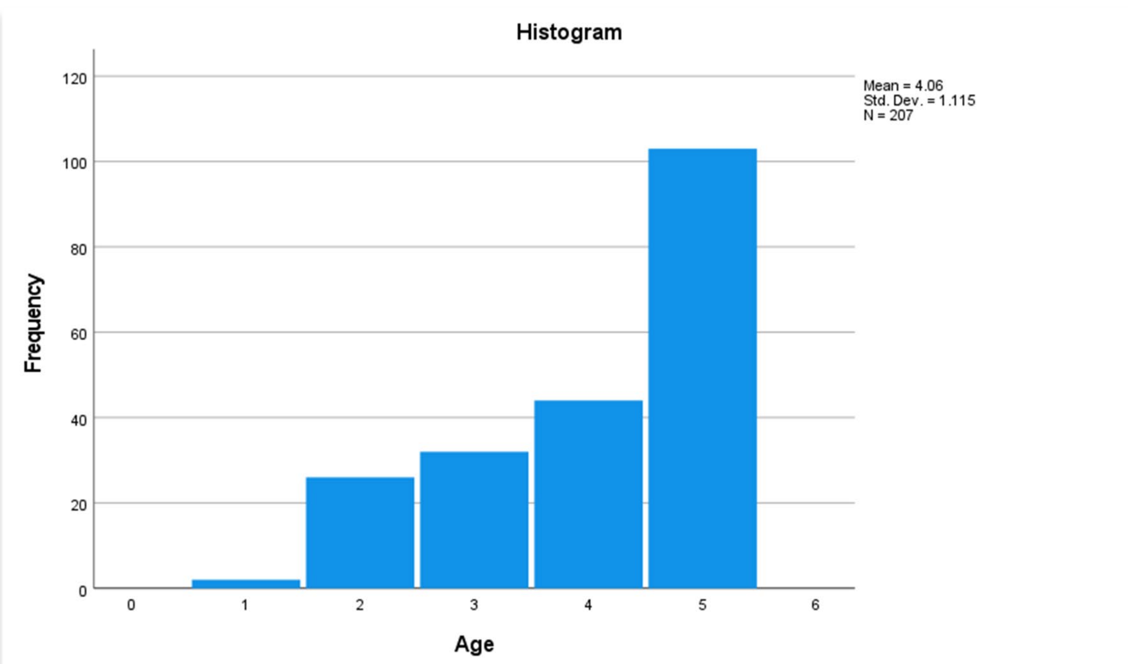
Item	***n***	**%**
Gender: Female	95	46
Gender: Male	112	54
Total	**207**	**100**
Age (years): 18-29	2	1
Age (years): 30-39	26	13
Age (years): 40-49	32	15
Age (years): 50-59	44	21
Age (years): 60+	103	50
Total	**207**	**100**
Length of Residency (years): 0-9	83	40
Length of Residency (years): 10-19	45	22
Length of Residency (years): 20-29	36	17
Length of Residency (years): 30-39	15	7
Length of Residency (years): 40+	28	14
Total	**207**	**100**

Upon further inquiry, the demographic results reflect a pattern in which response volume was greater as the age range increased. Additionally, the largest group of responses had 0-9 LOR, comprising 40% (*n* = 83) of the total sample. This group was followed by the next two shortest residencies 10-19 years (*n* = 45) and 20-29 years (*n* = 36), which made up 22% and 17% of the results, respectively. The last two groups included the range 30-39 (7% of total; *n* = 15) and 40+ (14% of total; *n* = 28).

The age and LOR results offer insight into the participant group as a whole. Noted earlier, there appears to be a relationship between age range and response volume; the higher the age range, the greater the response volume. This pattern is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Relationship between Age and Response Volume

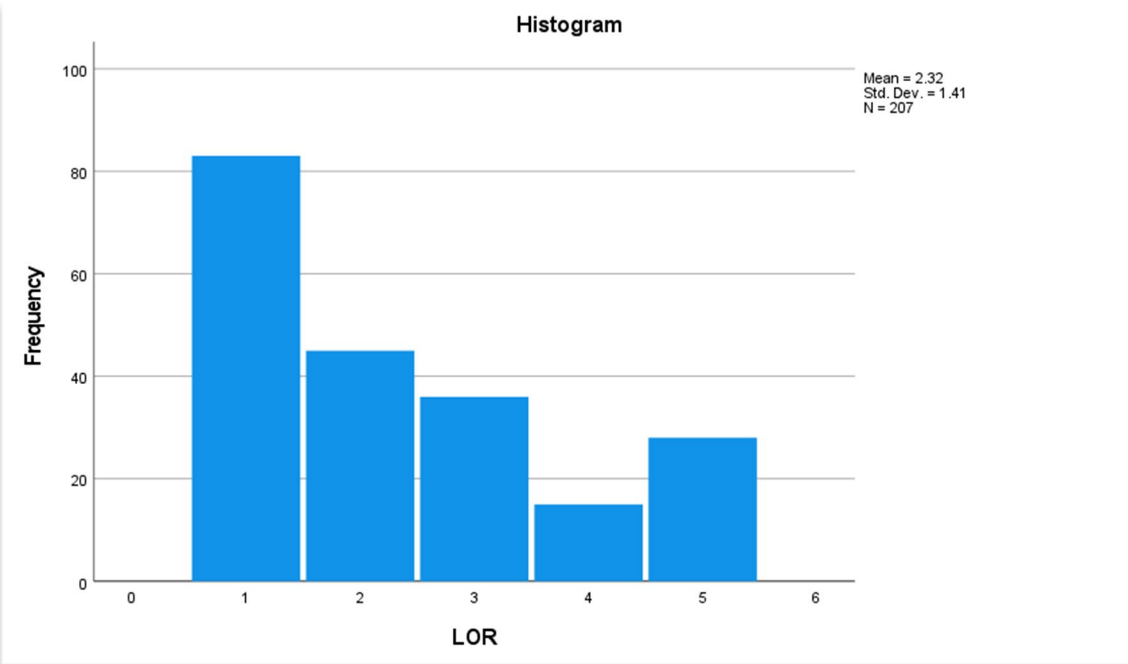


Additionally, there appears to be an association, albeit not as definitive as the age-response volume relationship, between LOR and response volume. However, the results depict a relationship that is the inverse of the age and response volume observation. As shown in Figure

2, the LOR-response volume indicates that the shorter the residency tenure, the greater the response volume.

Figure 2

Relationship between LOR and Response Volume



These two apparent patterns have support considering the rapid residential expansion within Whitehouse among the 60+ demographic in the last 10 years (Dixon, 2021).

The explanatory variables measured on the ORPR scale provided six items for trust, three items each for compassion, politeness, promptness, and customization, and two items each for competence and reliability. All items were scored on a 10-point range Likert-type scale. Table 4 provides the means and standard deviations for these variables plus the three demographic variables. As reflected by the high means, overall, respondents appear to be satisfied across all dimensions.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables

Variable	***Mean***	***SD***
Trust	7.87	2.02
Competence	7.33	2.18
Customization	6.58	2.47
Promptness	7.67	2.22
Reliability	7.81	2.14
Compassion	7.52	2.20
Civility	7.93	2.23
Length of Residency (LOR)	2.32	1.41
Age	4.06	1.12
Gender	1.54	0.50

Note. LOR and age are each dummy coded 1-5 (see Table 2) Gender is dummy coded 1 = Female, 2 = Male

When examining for data normality, variable means and standard deviations appeared skewed to the higher side of the possible scoring range than to the minimum. Table 5 presents the variable skewness and Kurtosis scores for each of the predictor and outcome variables. Results reflect skewness scores ranging from -1.31 to .74. Additionally, Kurtosis values ranged from -.74 to 1.71. Thus, there appears be moderate skewness of the results yet are within statistically acceptable limits of +/- 2 skewness and +/- 3 Kurtosis to support the assumption of data normality (Field, 2000 & 2009; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2014; Trochim & Donnelly, 2006; Yuan, et. al., 2005).

Table 5

Skewness and Kurtosis Statistics

Value	T	CPT	CU	P	R	CPS	CI	LOR
Skewness	-1.20	-.89	-.23	-1.21	-1.31	-.99	-1.39	.74
SE Skewness	.17	.17	.18	.17	.17	.17	.17	.17
Kurtosis	1.37	.51	-.36	1.12	1.49	.74	1.71	-.74
SE Kurtosis	.34	.34	.35	.34	.34	.34	.34	.34

Note. T = Trust. CPT = Competence. CU = Customization. P = Promptness. R = Reliability. CPS = Compassion. CI = Civility. LOR = Length of Residency

All relevant study variables were highly correlated with each other. For example, the six public service dimensions were all highly correlated with each other, with *r* ranging from .75 to .94. In addition, those six dimensions were highly correlated with the outcome variable trust, with *r* ranging from .81 to .93. These results highlight the presence of multicollinearity among the six predictor variables. This concern, detailed in Table 6, is reflected by correlation values greater than .80 for all of the six dimensions correlated with the other dimensions (Farrar & Glauber, 1967). Addressing this concern, a subsequent test of variable inflation factor (VIF) was conducted. Review of the results confirmed the initial suspicion of multicollinearity with all variable VIFs scoring above 4.0.

The mere presence of multicollinearity, however, is not itself a threat to this research given that the first six hypotheses are separate and only focus on correlations between predictor variables and the outcome variable one at a time. It does, however, suggest that respondents may not be distinguishing the fine-tuned differences between the predictor variables and trust. Additionally, the presence of multicollinearity may also indicate that participants responded with affirmation bias (Klayman, 1995; Nickerson, 1998; Oswald & Grosjean, 2004). These potential limitations are addressed in greater detail in the Discussion chapter.

Table 6

Correlations for Independent, Dependent, and Moderator Variables

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h
a	Trust	1.00[1]							
b	Customization	0.81[1]	1.00[1]						
c	Competence	0.87[1]	0.82[1]	1.00[1]					
d	Reliability	0.87[1]	0.75[1]	0.84[1]	1.00[1]				
e	Promptness	0.86[1]	0.80[1]	0.84[1]	0.92[1]	1.00[1]			
f	Compassion	0.93[1]	0.85[1]	0.91[1]	0.87[1]	0.89[1]	1.00[1]		
g	Civility	0.89[1]	0.78[1]	0.88[1]	0.89[1]	0.89[1]	0.94[1]	1.00[1]	
h	LOR	0.06	-0.02	0.07	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.07	1.00

Note. [1]Significant at $p = .01$; $n = 207$

Results for Sub-Research Questions 1-6

The ensuing section discusses the statistical examination of the sub-research questions and related correlational hypotheses $H_1 – H_6$. Each of these hypotheses predicted a positive relationship between the six predictor variables (i.e., customization, promptness, civility, reliability, competence, and compassion) with the criterion variable (trust). Demonstrated in the following, each of the six correlational hypothesis results are detailed.

Sub-RQ1**:** *Does the public's perceived competence of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?*

H_1 posits that residents' affirmative assessment of competent (i.e., the level to which constituents perceive LG representatives as holding sufficient knowledge, skills, and abilities to deliver fundamental public services (Wallace Ingraham & Getha-Taylor, 2005)) LG public services is positively related to public trust. Shown in Table 7, the Pearson correlation test results reveal a strong, positive relationship between the variables competence and trust ($r = .87$, $p < .01$, $n = 207$). This finding, being statistically significant, provides evidence that H_1 is supported.

Table 7

Competence and Trust Correlation Test Results

		Competence	**Trust**
Competence	Pearson Correlation	1.00	.87
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.00
	n	207	207
Trust	Pearson Correlation	.87	1.00
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.00	.00
	n	207	207

Note. All correlation results are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Further analysis revealed that correlation values between competence and trust decreased as the respondent age range increased. For example, Table 8 correlation values between competence and trust are highest among the age bracket 30-39 (r = .93, n = 26), followed by the age ranges 40-49 (r = .92, n = 32), 50-59 (r = .86, n = 44), and 60+ (r = .84, n = 103), respectively.

Although the sample size for the youngest age range (18-29) is too small to be included in the analysis (n = 2), each of the older successive ranges suggest the possibility of a) a declining view of LG competence and b) an increased distinction between the variables competence and trust. Possible contributing factors to these suggested phenomena are discussed in the next chapter.

Table 8

Pearson Correlation Values Compared by Age Range

Age	Sample	CPT/T	CPS/T	CI/T	R/T	C/T	P/T
30-39	26	.93	.93	.94	.88	.86	.88
40-49	32	.92	.96	.95	.94	.90	.91
50-59	44	.86	.90	.87	.89	.75	.82
60+	103	.84	.93	.89	.85	.82	.87

Note. T = Trust; CPT = Competence; CU = Customization; P = Promptness; R = Reliability; CPS = Compassion; CI = Civility: LOR = Length of Residency; All correlation results are significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Sub-RQ2: *Does the public's perception of LG's ability to customize public service solutions influence public trust?*

H_2 sets forth the hypothesis that public trust is positively related with residents' favorable perception of LG's ability to customize (i.e., the LG's ability to adjust and tailor-fit public services to the needs of the resident (Timonen et al., 2016)) public service solutions. Demonstrating support for H_2 in Table 9, findings reveal a substantial association between customization and trust ($r = .81$, $p < .01$, $n = 194$).

Table 9

Customization and Trust Correlation Test Results

		Customization	**Trust**
Customization	Pearson Correlation	1.00	.81
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.00
	n	194	194
Trust	Pearson Correlation	.81	1.00
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.00	.00
	n	194	207

Note. All correlation results are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

After examining the results relating to customization, one item is worth highlighting. Of the six predictor variables tested, customization and trust scored lowest across each of the three general demographics. Reflected in Table 10, the customization/trust correlations were lowest among nine out of the 12 demographic sub-groups (in bold; Age: 30-39 (.86), 40-49 (.90), 50-59 (.75), and 60+ (.82); Gender: Female (.86) and Male (.79); LOR: 0-19 (.82), 30-39 (.77), and 40+ (.76)). This suggests that respondents may be discerning customization as more distinct from trust than the other predictor variables.

Table 10

Pearson Correlation Analysis by Demographic Sub-Groups

Variable	Sample	CPT/T	CPS/T	CI/T	R/T	C/T	P/T
Age 18-29	2	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Age 30-39	26	.93	.93	.94	.88	**.86**	.88
Age 40-49	32	.92	.96	.95	.94	**.90**	.91
Age 50-59	44	.86	.90	.87	.89	**.75**	.82
60+	103	.84	.93	.89	.85	**.82**	.87
Female	95	.91	.95	.94	.93	**.86**	.91
Male	112	.83	.91	.85	.79	**.79**	.80
LOR 0-9	83	.91	.94	.91	.88	.88	.84
LOR 10-19	45	.87	.95	.94	.90	**.82**	.89
LOR 20-29	36	.75	.91	.85	.83	.76	.86
LOR 30-39	15	.96	.94	.87	.84	**.77**	.90
LOR 40+	28	.89	.88	.84	.90	**.76**	.82

Note. T = Trust; CPT = Competence; C = Customization; P = Promptness; R = Reliability; CPS = Compassion; CI = Civility: LOR = Length of Residency; All correlation results are significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

Sub-RQ3: *Does the public's perceived promptness of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?*

The third hypothesis, H_3, purports that public trust is positively related with residents' affirmative perception of LG's prompt (i.e., the timely provision of public services, as determined by the public (Ocampo et al., 2019)) public services. Noted in Table 11, the Pearson correlation test of the association between the predictor variable promptness and the outcome variable trust shows that the relationship is positive, with a high correlation value, and is statistically significant ($r = .86$, $p < .01$, $n = 203$).

Table 11

Promptness and Trust Correlation Test Results

		Promptness	**Trust**
Promptness	Pearson Correlation	1.00	.86
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.00
	n	203	203
Trust	Pearson Correlation	.86	1.00
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.00	.00
	n	203	207

Note. All correlation results are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Sub-RQ4: *Does the public's perceived reliability of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?*

H_4 hypothesizes that public trust in LG is positively related with residents' favorable perception of LG's public services reliability (i.e., the delivery of public services in a manner deemed dependable by the public (Van Oort, 2011)). Given a) the affirmative relationship between reliability and trust, b) the strong relational value ($r = .87$), and c) the test was statistically significant ($p < .01$, $n = 205$), the correlation results indicates that the hypothesis is supported. Results are shown in Table 12 below.

Table 12

Reliability and Trust Correlation Test Results

		Reliability	**Trust**
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	1.00	.87
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.00
	n	205	205
Trust	Pearson Correlation	.87	1.00
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.00	.00
	n	205	207

Note. All correlation results are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Sub-RQ5: *Does the public's perceived compassion of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?*

The next hypothesis, H_5, asserts that public trust in LG is positively related with residents' approving perception of LG's compassionate (i.e., the degree to which the public perceives LG representatives as possessing a warm, approachable, and caring disposition (Perry, 1997)) public service delivery. In support of this hypothesis, test results shown in Table 13 reveal a positive, statistically significant correlation between the variables compassion and trust (r = 0.93, $p < .01$, $n = 205$).

Table 13

Compassion and Trust Correlation Test Results

		Compassion	**Trust**
Compassion	Pearson Correlation	1.00	.93
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.00
	n	205	205
Trust	Pearson Correlation	.93	1.00
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.00	.00
	n	205	207

Note. All correlation results are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Looking deeper into the compassion/trust correlation reveals that this relationship is the strongest of the examined correlations (see Table 14). The compassion/trust correlation is so strong (r = .93), however, it suggests the strong presence of multicollinearity. Accordingly, this implies that respondents did not discern much difference between the two variables.

Table 14

Pearson Intercorrelation Test of Predictor Variables Results

Variable	**Sample**	**CPT**	**CPS**	**CI**	**R**	**C**	**P**
Trust	207	.87	**.93**	.89	.87	.81	.86

Note. CPT = Competence; C = Customization; P = Promptness; R = Reliability; CPS = Compassion; CI = Civility. Correlation results are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Sub-RQ6: Does the public's perceived civility of public services delivered influence public trust in their LG?

The last correlational hypothesis examined was H_6. This hypothesis asserts that public trust in LG is positively related with residents' affirmative perception of LG's civil (i.e., the degree to which LG representatives are perceived as courteous and considerate (Lindquist & Eichbaum, 2016)) public service delivery. Exhibited in Table 15, results communicate a strong correlation between the variables civility and trust ($r = 0.89$, $p < .01$, $n = 207$). This discovery, being statistically significant, indicates that H_6 is supported.

Table 15

Civility and Trust Correlation Test Results

		Civility	**Trust**
Civility	Pearson Correlation	1.00	.89
	Sig. (2-Tailed)		.00
	n	207	207
Trust	Pearson Correlation	.89	1.00
	Sig. (2-Tailed)	.00	.00
	n	207	207

Note. All correlation results are significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results for Sub-Research Question 7

Sub-research question seven posits that the individual effects of LG competence, civility, compassion, customization, reliability, and promptness on trust will each and increase as LOR increases. As such, six hypotheses were tested for the potential moderating interaction of LOR on the relationships between the predictor and outcome variables.

For the hypothesized interaction, hierarchical regression was used in assessing the moderation hypotheses ($H_{7(a\text{-}f)}$) and included three steps. The hierarchical regression procedures included building a model involving main effect terms for all six predictor variables in addition to product terms representing each moderator effect (Cohen and Cohen, 1983). Step One of this process involved entering in the main effect for the predictor variables. In Step Two, the LOR variable was added. This step tested for the direction and strength of relationship between each of the predictor variables (main effect) and the outcome variable. As noted in Table 6, all correlations (*r*) were greater than or equal to .75 with a range from .75 to .94. This test also included evidence for statistical significance, which was reflected in a *p-value* $< .01$. Thus, both the direction (positive) and extent of numerical correlations supported advancement to the next step.

Step Three involved testing for the moderating effect of LOR. Specifically, the interaction between the main effect for trust antecedents (independent variables) with LOR was added. For the six moderation tests, each predictor variable was separately assessed for the hypothesized moderating effect, LOR. To accomplish this, interaction terms (new variables) were created by first, mean-centering the data, followed by multiplying the LOR variable by each of the predictors. These variables were then tested using trust as the outcome. The crucial test was to determine if the regressed product term generated a significant amount of incremental variance explained, denoted by ΔR^2. This step was subsequently run testing each of the independent-dependent-interaction variables separately. Lastly, as in Step One, an evaluation of significance via the *p-value* was conducted to test whether the change in R^2 was significant compared to the previous step. Table 16 displays the results of this test.

Table 16

Regression Analysis with Outcome Variable Trust

Variable	**Step 1: R^2**	**Step 2: R^2**	**Step 2: ΔR^2**	**Step 3: R^2**	**Step 3: ΔR^2**
Competence	.75*	.75	.00	.75	.00
Compassion	.87*	.87	.00	.87	.00
Civility	.80*	.80	.00	.80	.00
Reliability	.75*	.75	.00	.75	.00
Customization	.66*	.67	.00	.67	.00
Promptness	.74*	.74	.00	.74	.00

Note. Predictor variables are included in Step 1; main effects of LOR entered in Step 2; Predictor variables X LOR interaction entered in Step3.

Considering Step One of the analysis, an examination into the impact of the independent variables on trust utilizing ordinary least squares regression (OLS) was conducted. The overall model regression results (R^2 = .88, p < 0.001) as well as all predictor variables (i.e. competence (R^2 = .75, $p < 0.001$), compassion (R^2 = .87, $p < 0.001$), civility (R^2 = .80, $p < 0.001$), reliability (R^2 = .75, $p < 0.001$), customization (R^2 = .66, $p < 0.001$), and promptness (R^2 = .74, $p < 0.001$) provided the baseline upon which to conduct the Step Two assessment.

Next, hierarchical regression was used to test the hypothesized moderating effect that LOR has on the relationship between the independent variables and trust. Each of those six tests are reported as follows.

$H_{7(a)}$ posits that the effect of resident perceptions of LG competence on trust will increase as LOR increases. The regression results indicate that, although the slope of the competence/trust relationship remained positive and strong in Step Three ($b = .81$, $p < 0.001$), the testing of product term Competence x Trust in Step Three was found not significant (ns). Accordingly, with no statistical significance, $H_{7(a)}$ is not supported.

Next, $H_{7(b)}$ asserts that the effect of residents' favorable perception of LG's ability to customize public service solutions will increase as LOR increases. Results reflect that the customization/trust association experienced an increase in slope, from $b = .67$ in Step Two to $b = .71$ in Step Three. Although the slope in Step Three was positive and significant ($p = < .001$), the testing of product term Customization x Trust in Step Three was determined to be not significant. Therefore, the moderation hypothesis $H_{7(b)}$ is not supported.

The third hypothesis, $H_{7(c)}$, purports that the effect of residents' affirmative perception of LG's prompt services on public trust will increase as LOR increases. The hierarchical regression test demonstrated that the promptness/trust product term experienced a slight decrease in slope, from $b = .78$ (Step Two, $p < .001$) to $b = .73$ (Step 3, $p < .001$). As with the previous two hypothesis test results, testing with addition of the product term Promptness x Trust was found not significant. Considering this, the hypothesis $H_{7(c)}$ is not supported.

The fourth hypothesis, $H_{7(d)}$, asserts that the effect of residents' favorable perception of reliable LG public services on public trust in LG increases as LOR increases. The results indicate that the slope of the reliability/trust relationship remained positive and strong in Step Three ($b = .84$, $p < 0.001$). However, adding the product term Reliability x Trust produced results that were not significant. Thus, this finding, being not significant statistically, indicates that $H_{7(d)}$ is not supported.

$H_{7(e)}$ states that the effect of residents' approving perception of LG compassionate public service delivery on trust in LG increases as LOR increases. The outcome from the hierarchical regression test reflects that the compassion/trust association experienced a considerable increase in slope, from $b = .85$ in Step Two to $b = .93$ in Step Three. Although the slope was positive and significant in Step Three ($p = < .001$), the interaction term Compassion x Trust was found not significant. Therefore, the moderation hypothesis $H_{7(e)}$ is not supported.

The final hypothesis, $H_{7(f)}$, claims that the effect of residents' affirmative perception of LG's civil service delivery on public trust in LG increases as LOR increases. The results of this regression test were, in the end, the same as in the previous five hypotheses. Specifically, the hierarchical regression test reveals that the civility/trust relationship experienced an increase in slope, from $b = .81$ (Step Two, $p < .001$) to $b = .85$ (Step Three, $p < .001$). However, the moderation term Civility x Trust was not statistically significant. Considering this, the hypothesis $H_{7(f)}$ is not supported.

As previously described in the Methodology section, the final step in this process was to depict the results of the moderation test in graphical form. This process normally involves comparing the pre-interaction plot with that of the post-interaction. As reported, none of the moderating hypotheses produced evidence of the interaction with statistical significance. This resulted in unsupported hypotheses. Therefore, depicting the plots of each of the pre- and post-moderation effects were deemed unnecessary.

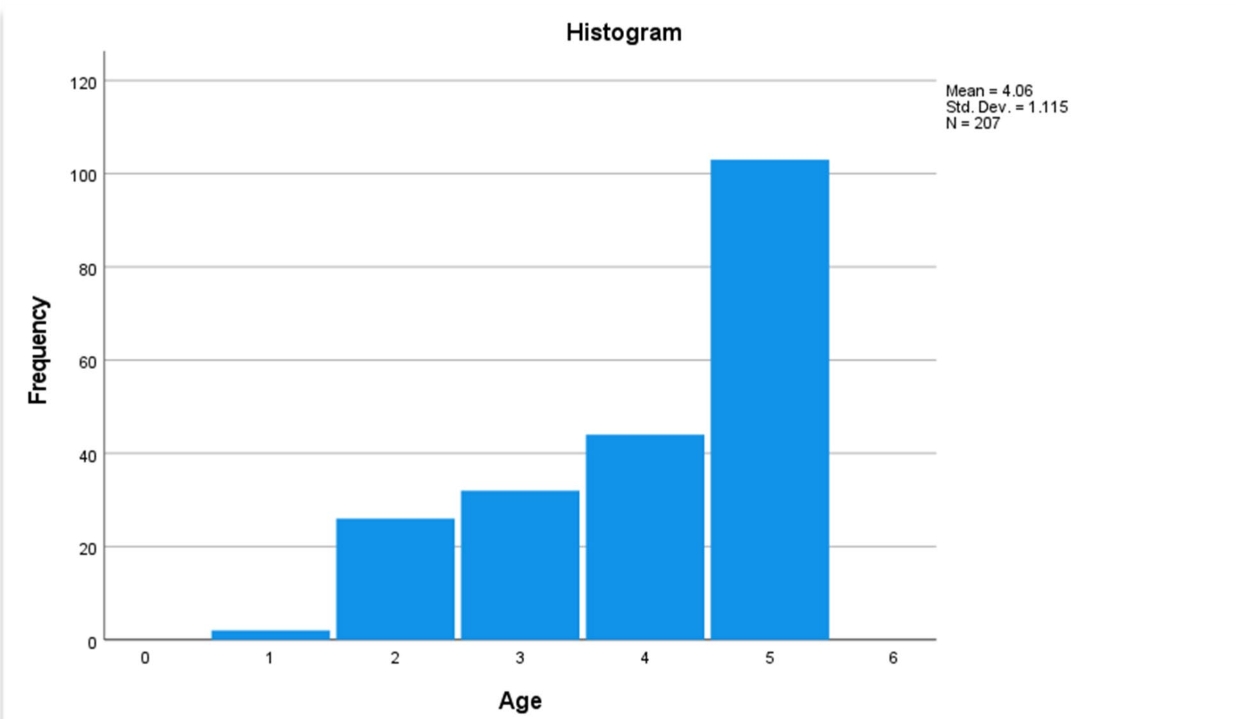
Additional Analysis

The previous analysis of descriptive statistics was presented in Table 3 by breaking down survey responses into sub-categories. Additionally, the review of data reliability, though determined to be acceptable, showed signs of data skewness. Also, test results revealed the strong presence of multicollinearity. These overly strong intercorrelations may have contributed to each of the six moderation hypothesis tests lacking support due to the lack of delineation between predictor and dependent variables. These combined observations provoked interest in further investigation as to multicollinearity factors and the lack of hypotheses support. Although outside the scope of the original research design, the researcher believed that an investigation into possible causes would aide in the value of the research discussion and implications.

Based on the response demographics presented in Table 3, graphical depictions of those data, in the form of histograms, are presented in Figure 3 (Age), Figure 4 (Gender), and Figure 5 (LOR) below.

Figure 3

Response Demographic for Age



The first phenomenon of note was the significant size of those within the 60+ year range (dummy code = 5) as compared with the others. Specifically, the 60+ group constituted 50% (n = 103) of the total responses. The response within this group was more than double the rate (234%) than that of the next closest age bracket 50-59 (21%, n = 44). Given this information, the researcher designed an additional correlation analysis controlling for the age group 60+.

The second observation from the histograms was the prevalent response volume of residents with a tenure ranging 0-9 years. This group constituted 40% (n = 83) of the total responses. The next closest was represented by the 10-19 LOR group (22%, n = 45). Given this, the researcher re-tested Pearson's correlation controlling for the 0-9 LOR group.

The third and final consideration centered on the high multicollinearity and the researcher's supposition that many respondents may not have distinguished the subtle differences between some of the predictor variables and trust. More specifically, the researcher speculated if responses with lower Likert scores (e.g., ≤ 6.0, on average) would significantly decrease the presence of multicollinearity. Considering this, supplemental correlation analysis was conducted to gauge the potential impact of groups thought to exhibit more discriminating responses.

Figure 4

Response Demographic for Gender

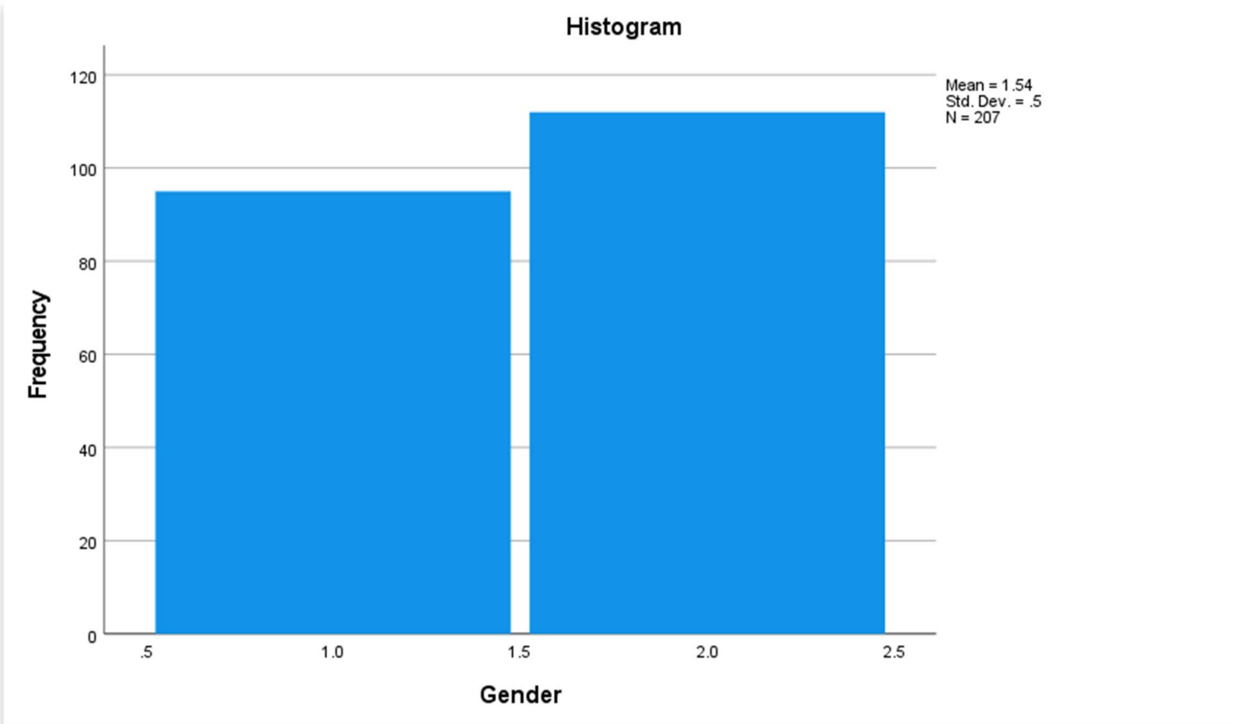
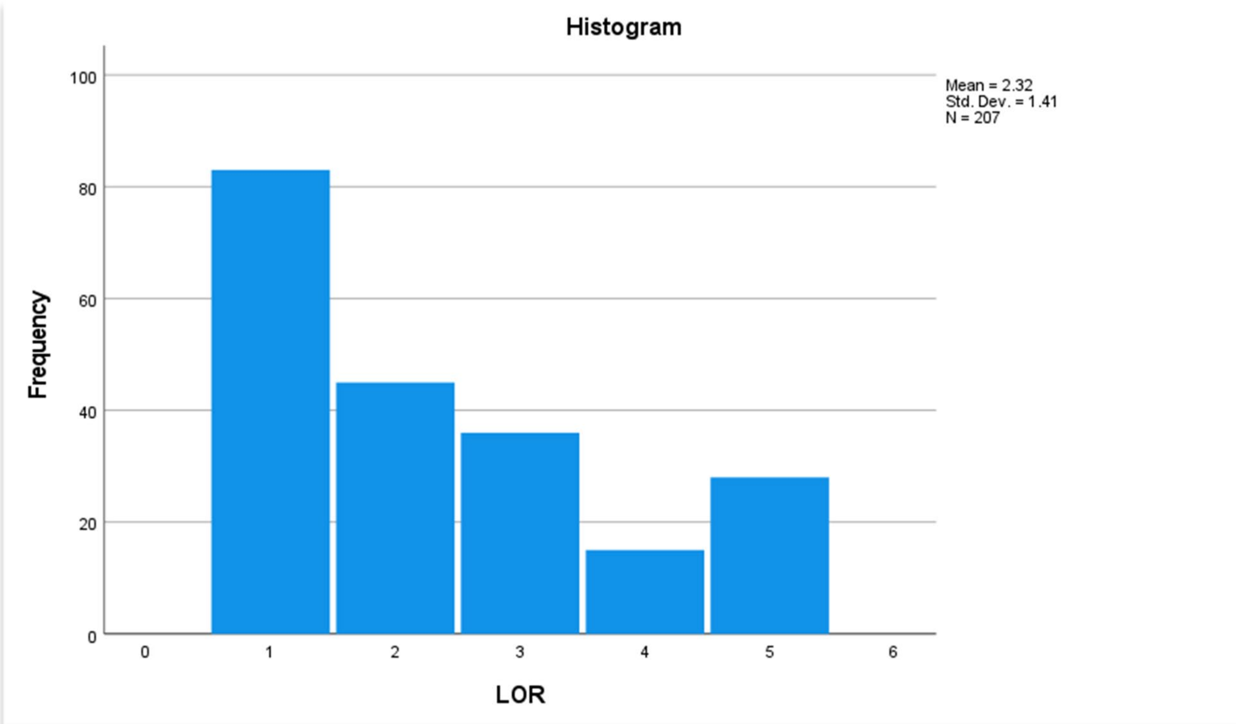


Figure 5

Response Demographic for LOR



The first re-testing of the correlation values was conducted controlling for the age range 60+. The results are presented in Table 17 below. Analysis shows that controlling for the age range 60+ resulted in an increase, not a decrease as was proposed, of multicollinearity strength. Correlations that experienced an increase from the original test are in bold. Therefore, there appears to be no significant impact on variable intercorrelations when controlling for the group with the highest response volume.

Table 17

Correlations Controlling for Age Range 60+

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g
a	Trust	1.00[1]						
b	Customization	0.81[1]	1.00[1]					
c	Competence	**0.90**[1]	**0.85**[1]	1.00[1]				
d	Reliability	**0.90**[1]	**0.82**[1]	**0.92**[1]	1.00[1]			
e	Promptness	0.86[1]	**0.82**[1]	**0.87**[1]	0.92[1]	1.00[1]		
f	Compassion	0.93[1]	**0.86**[1]	**0.94**[1]	**0.92**[1]	0.88[1]	1.00[1]	
g	Civility	**0.92**[1]	**0.81**[1]	**0.94**[1]	**0.93**[1]	0.89[1]	**0.95**[1]	1.00[1]

Note. [1]Significant at $p = .001$; $n = 104$

Next, re-testing of the Pearson correlation values was conducted controlling for the residency tenure range 0-9. The results are presented in Table 18 below. The analysis shows that, although the strength of relationships among the majority of correlations decreased (in bold), controlling for the residency tenure range 0-9 did not result in a significant decrease of the presence of multicollinearity.

Table 18

Correlations Controlling for LOR 0-9

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g
a	Trust	1.00[1]						
b	Customization	0.81[1]	1.00[1]					
c	Competence	**0.84**[1]	0.81[1]	1.00[1]				
d	Reliability	**0.86**[1]	**0.72**[1]	0.84[1]	1.00[1]			
e	Promptness	0.87[1]	**0.78**[1]	0.84[1]	0.93[1]	1.00[1]		
f	Compassion	0.93[1]	**0.83**[1]	**0.89**[1]	0.87[1]	0.91[1]	1.00[1]	
g	Civility	**0.87**[1]	**0.76**[1]	**0.86**[1]	0.89[1]	0.91[1]	0.94[1]	1.00[1]

Note. [1]Significant at $p = .001$; $n = 123$

The last correlation re-test controlled for average Likert scoring above 6.0. In doing so, responses with Likert scores above 6.0 were excluded. Results are presented in Table 19. The analysis shows that 16 of the correlations (in bold) experienced significant decreases in strength including five of the six predictor/trust relationships (e.g., competence/trust (32%), compassion/trust (21%), civility/trust (19%), compassion/trust (7%), and reliability/trust (12%). Furthermore, controlling for average Likert scores above 6.0 resulted in 11 of the relationships dropping below the .80 standard of multicollinearity (Farrar & Glauber, 1967).

Table 19

Correlations Controlling for Average Likert Scores Above 6.0

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g
a	Trust	1.00[1]						
b	Customization	0.82[1]	1.00[1]					
c	Competence	**0.55**[1]	**0.72**[1]	1.00[1]				
d	Reliability	**0.75**[1]	0.81[1]	**0.73**[1]	1.00[1]			
e	Promptness	**0.74**[1]	0.96[1]	**0.76**[1]	**0.82**[1]	1.00[1]		
f	Compassion	**0.86**[1]	**0.81**[1]	**0.70**[1]	**0.77**[1]	0.91[1]	1.00[1]	
g	Civility	**0.74**[1]	**0.93**[1]	**0.69**[1]	**0.71**[1]	0.96[1]	**0.91**[1]	1.00[1]

Note. [1]Significant at p = .001; n = 25

When controlling for average Likert scores, the change in correlations were so considerable that the researcher conducted further testing. Given that the previous results supported the presupposition that higher average Likert scores tend to diminish discrimination between predictor variables and trust, an additional correlation test was conducted controlling for average Likert scores above 5.0. This test was conducted to see if correlations would decrease even further the more that respondents, on average, were thought to make distinctions between independent and dependent variables. Table 20 provides the results of that test.

Table 20

Correlations Controlling for Average Likert Scores Above 5.0

		a	b	c	d	e	f	g
a	Trust	1.00[1]						
b	Customization	0.96[1]	1.00[1]					
c	Competence	0.71[1]	**0.59**[1]	1.00[1]				
d	Reliability	0.84[1]	0.75[1]	0.90[1]	1.00[1]			
e	Promptness	0.97[1]	0.75[1]	**0.65**[1]	0.83[1]	1.00[1]		
f	Compassion	0.96[1]	0.98[1]	**0.66**[1]	0.81[1]	0.98[1]	1.00[1]	
g	Civility	0.93[1]	0.98[1]	**0.51**[1]	**0.70**[1]	0.98[1]	0.96[1]	1.00[1]

Note. [1]Significant at $p = .001$; $n = 12$

Findings show that running the correlation testing excluding individuals who had Likert scores above 5.0 resulted in an additional decline in relationship strength. In fact, five of the relationships (in bold) experienced further diminishment of correlational strength from the previous test that controlled for average Likert scores above 6.0. Moreover, as compared to the original Pearson correlation test, controlling for average Likert scores above 5.0 resulted in diminished correlational strength among 18 of the 21 predictor relationships. The outcomes showed that eight of the correlations fell under the .80 multicollinearity rule. It should be also noted that the diminished correlational strength may not be exclusively caused by overly optimistic responses. Decreased correlation strength is also a natural result of data range restriction (Alexander, 1988). Given these overall observations, it is surmised that controlling for the Likert scores above 6.0 and 5.0, respectively, suggests that affirmation bias may indeed have been present in the original research testing. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

Summary

The results offered insight into the way various demographics responded to the survey. Patterns of group response tendencies emerged that may potentially influence LG government practice and future research. After evaluating the instrument, the scale was determined to be reliable, with robust Cronbach alpha scores across each of the items. Although the data were moderately skewed, they were within statistically acceptable limits to support the assumption of data normality. Testing for variable independence via Pearson correlation matrix analysis revealed a strong presence of multicollinearity among most of the tested variables. This presence was primarily a concern regarding the testing of the moderation hypotheses.

The first six hypotheses, which posited positive Pearson correlations between each of the predictor variables and trust, were all supported with statistical significance. The last six hypotheses predicted that each of the relationships between the independent and dependent variables were moderated by the variable LOR. Regression testing results were not statistically significant across each of the tests. Ultimately, concern over data skewness as well as the presence of multicollinearity led to a supplemental investigation into potential contributing factors.

With interest in potential causes of the high multicollinearity, the researcher conducted additional Pearson correlation tests outside of the original research scope. Specifically, testing was conducted controlling for the dominant response rate in age (60+, n = 103, 50%), LOR (0-9, n = 83, 44%), and Likert scores (above 6.0, n = 182, 88% and 5.0, n = 195, 94%). Outcomes showed no notable decreases in multicollinearity scores when controlling for the dominate age and LOR ranges. However, correlational strength fell below the multicollinearity threshold in both Likert score re-tests. These results imply that affirmation bias may have contributed to the high multicollinearity in the original hypotheses tests.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to examine the potential relationship between trust predictors and public trust in LG. The selected predictors originated from the seminal work of Coulter and Coulter (2002) which centered on trust antecedents within the services realm. Like their research, this study investigated the correlational relationship between both the person-related (i.e., civility and compassion) and offer-related (i.e., competence, reliable, prompt, and customized) independent variables with the dependent variable public trust. Along with these relationships, this research endeavored to understand whether the length of relationship, operationalized in the form of length of residency, functioned as a moderator in the examined relationships.

This study's concentration on determinants of public trust within the LG environment is relevant considering two primary factors. First, public trust in government at large is near historic lows (Pew Research Center, 2021) and affects every level and form of public administration (Chanley et al., 2000). As Kemmis (2006) describes, such a condition offers action researchers opportunities to understand public trust factors and to channel scholarly and public servant energies into government reforming initiatives. Second, there is scant available research that centers on the local level of government (Citrin, 1974; Citrin & Green, 1986; Mitchell & Scott, 1987; Miller, 1974; Williams, 1987). Much of what is available within the LG domain focuses on employee behavior and motivation (Bryna Sanger, 2008), qualitative levels of public services (Moynihan, 2008; Radin, 2006; Schick, 2001; Thomas, 2008), and generalized public perceptions (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003; Public Management Foundation, 1996). Moreover, there is no known scholarly literature investigating trust factors at the local level.

This is despite the assertion that LGs, due to proximity to constituents, have the greatest potential to influence public trust (Christensen et al., 2020; Hendrix, 2019; Fredrickson, 1997; Job, 2005).

Included in the research's main findings is that the six correlation hypotheses were supported. Specifically, the six predictor variables were strongly correlated to public trust. Given this, evidence suggests that the six factors indeed influence public trust with person-related factors (i.e., civility and compassion) exerting a slightly stronger influence than person-related factors (i.e., competence, reliability, promptness, and customization). Another finding was that those correlations were so strong that they introduced challenges associated with multicollinearity. These challenges imply that respondents had a difficult time distinguishing between antecedents of public trust and public trust itself. Additionally, evidence indicates that the multicollinearity influenced the moderation hypotheses, which were ultimately unsupported. Despite these challenges, further inquiry revealed potential causes of the multicollinearity.

In addition to discussing these and other findings in greater depth, this chapter examines the implications derived from the interpretation and the research's limitation. Lastly, each of these discussed topics are then integrated into recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Research Questions 1-6 Results

Sub-research questions 1 through 6 explored whether a correlational relationship exists between the predictor variables (i.e., competence, compassion, civility, reliability, promptness, and customization) and the outcome variable (public trust). Results from the data analysis demonstrated evidence of positive and strong correlations among each of the hypothesized relationships between independent and criterion variables. Consequently, with each of the hypotheses (H_1 – H_6) being supported with statistically significant positive correlations, evidence suggests that each of the predictor variables are meaningful factors in influencing public trust.

Although high correlations typically suggest problematic implications with multicollinearity (and will be discussed further in the limitations section), within the context of this project they also provided solution-oriented insights for both scholars and practitioners. More pointedly, findings from the results shed light on tiered evaluations of trust antecedents upon which trust reforming initiatives can be based. In other words, the data reveal that, within this sample, certain antecedents are stronger influencers of public trust than others. Armed with this information, LG representatives can make empirically based decisions centered on improving public trust-something that had eluded scholarship and practice until now. Noted in Table 21 below, mean Likert responses are presented by trust antecedent in descending order.

Table 21

Likert Response Means and Standard Deviations for Predictor Variables

Variable	***Mean***	***SD***
1. Civility	7.93	2.23
2. Reliability	7.81	2.14
3. Promptness	7.67	2.22
4. Compassion	7.52	2.20
5. Competence	7.33	2.18
6. Customization	6.58	2.47

Although collectively the means are skewed, the results provide some noteworthy observations with import for scholarship and LG management. The first is that sampled residents, on average, agree that LG person-related behaviors, in the form of civility and compassion, are critical to earning resident public trust. This is evidenced by the behavior and person-related factors reporting the highest average mean of the two sub-groups (*M* = 7.73 for person-related vs. *M* = 7.35 for offer-related). This, according to Petty and Cacioppa (1986), implies that the personal qualities of LG representatives signal “peripheral cues” that residents associate with public service trustworthiness. Public trust, therefore, appears to be more significantly impacted by person-related factors than by the more direct offer-related aspects (e.g., reliability, promptness, competence, and customization).

The notion of person-related factors influencing trust is important when considering their influence on people in general, and not just those with relationships with their LG. Evidence suggests that the manner in which services are rendered, vis-à-vis person-related factors, affect trust not only in the public sector (Kim, 2005; Thomas, 1998), but in other service domains as well. Take, for example, bedside care within the healthcare domain. Multiple research efforts found that patient care, in the form of civil and compassionate services from the patient’s perspective, are strongly predictive of trust in healthcare representatives (Bloomfield, 2015; Fotaki, M. (2015). Ramirez, et al., 2016; Nathoo, et al., 2021; Waters & Whyte, 2012). These predictions are also found in other fields including marketing and financial services (Sharma & Patterson, 1999), hospitality (Ma, et al., 2020), and retail and customer service (Macintosh, G. (2009). These findings suggest that, irrespective of the service domain, compassion and civility are trust-engendering factors valued by service recipients. Given this, LG leaders should investigate further what constitutes caring and polite service delivery from their residents’ perspective, and, with the findings, adopt initiatives focused on effectively delivering them to the public.

The strength of the dyadic relationship between civility and compassion is also worth highlighting. Among the intercorrelations, the relationship between civility and compassion proved to be the strongest, with $r = .94$, $p < .001$. As such, combined with holding the highest dyadic mean Likert values, these results indicate that survey respondents view them collectively as the primary determinants of their trust in LG. This finding is supported by other trust research (Kim, 2005; Moorman et al., 1993; Thomas, 1998). Specifically, the seminal work by Moorman et al. (1993) suggests that civility and compassion converge as a form of congeniality, in which service representatives are perceived as friendly, courteous, and caringly disposed toward the service recipient. Incidentally, this convergent dimension, in addition to trust, has also been linked to satisfaction (Ives et al., 1983) and favorable assessments of service quality (Zeithaml et al., 1990). Although congeniality's presence is not always necessary for establishing trusting relationships (Crouch & Yetton, 1988), it seems reasonable that, given residents' proximity to their LG (Christensen et al., 2020; Hendrix, 2019; Fredrickson, 1997; Job, 2005) and the bearing public service representatives' behavior has on public trust (Kim, 2005; Thomas, 1998), residents are likely to make attributions about LG trustworthiness based on these behavioral cues.

Results also revealed patterns related to both demographic and social need influences. Means of Likert scores were evaluated and results were then sub-categorized by age range. Based on the analysis depicted in Table 22, residents under the age of 40 ($M = 7.65$, $SD = 2.14$, $n = 28$) showed higher Likert scores on average than those 40 years and older ($M = 7.44$, $SD = 2.26$, $n = 179$). A recent report may provide some explanation for this. According to Dixon (2021), a local study suggests that many Whitehouse residents are highly pleased with the community and particularly with the local school district. Given this finding, it may account for the higher average scores among the age group (i.e., 30-39) with children typically entering formal schooling (Mathews, 2016). This may imply that major social needs of those under 40 are being met by a broader range of community service providers than just the LG.

Table 22

Descriptive Statistics by Age Group

Variable	**30-39*M***	**30-39*SD***	**40-49*M***	**40-49*SD***	**50-59*M***	**50-59*SD***	**60+*M***	**60+*SD***
CPT	7.67	2.03	7.05	2.42	7.53	2.02	7.26	2.23
CPS	7.90	1.88	7.30	2.35	7.77	2.06	7.40	2.30
CI	8.13	1.96	7.44	2.44	8.24	2.05	7.92	2.30
R	7.96	2.15	7.36	2.33	7.88	1.99	7.91	2.14
P	7.71	2.36	7.28	2.45	7.95	2.05	7.68	2.21
C	7.07	2.54	6.41	2.35	6.72	2.65	6.45	2.44
Ave.	7.74	2.16	7.14	2.39	7.68	2.14	7.44	2.27

Note. CPT = Competence; C = Customization; P = Promptness; R = Reliability; CPS = Compassion; CI = Civility.

With the insight gained from examining emerging patterns from the general demographic responses, the researcher delved deeper into that data, parsing out highlights from the sub-groups' responses. More pointedly, each of the age sub-group's responses were analyzed and ranked as presented in Table 23. This analysis is apart from the age range 18-29 due to the extremely small sample size (e.g., n = 2).

Table 23

Ranking of Trust Factors by Age Group

Rank	Age: 30-39	Age: 40-49	Age: 50-59	Age: 60+
1.	Civility	Civility	Civility	Civility
2.	Reliability	Reliability	Promptness	Reliability
3.	Compassion	Compassion	Reliability	Promptness
4.	Promptness	Promptness	Compassion	Compassion
5.	Competence	Competence	Competence	Competence
6.	Customization	Customization	Customization	Customization

Among the sub-groups, ranking of responses by age revealed some notable insights. One of those insights is that each group, with only a couple of exceptions, ranked their LG alike in terms of trust factors. These results suggest that, overall, each of the age groups within this sample share the same assessment of their LG's offer-and person-related service value. For example, each age group evaluated their LG highest in civility and lowest in competence and customization, respectively. Although all dimensions scored high, thus resulting in the negatively skewed data, it affirmed the previous suggestion that respondents within this sample view their LG as having strong representative behavior and of providing person-related services (Coulter & Coulter, 2002). Conversely, these results also imply that their LG's competence and customization are a lesser valued strength when compared to the other factors. Further attention to this observation is given later when discussing practical implications.

With the highest average mean across all six trust factors, the 30-39 age range viewed their LG most optimistically ($M = 7.74$, $n = 26$). Additionally, average responses across the dimensions exhibited a tight variation of means (*M* = 7.07 to 8.13). Conversely, with the lowest average mean (*M* = 7.14, *n* = 32) across all six factors, the age range 40-49 viewed their LG least optimistically. This is despite the finding that all groups largely agreed on factor ranking. Next, the age range 50-59, as compared to the younger groups, had a more elevated assessment of their LG's promptness and reliability. Given that these two factors are linked with offer related service, this may suggest that residents in this group slightly prefers offer-related services as compared to younger residents. Additionally, the 50-59 group displayed the greatest range across scores (*M* = 6.72 to 8.24), indicating a greater distinction between LG service strengths than the other age groups. The age group 60+ ranked their LG similarly to the 30-39 and 40-49 groups except they assessed promptness as greater than compassion.

In terms of interpreting forces influencing multicollinearity, a potential underlying factor includes the previously mentioned halo effect. The halo effect, also referred to as the halo error, is a cognitive bias whereby perceptions of one qualitative factor is positively influenced by opinions on other related factors (Ries, 2006). Thus, the halo effect can cause overly optimistic assessments of one predictor variable simply based on the high evaluation of some other variable. In this study, for example, respondents may have assessed the investigated trust factors optimistically high in light of their positive assessment of another service component or other related factors. A broader example subsumes the attractiveness of Whitehouse as a quality bedroom community and the state-awarded local school district (Dixon, 2021). As such, respondents could have assessed the trust factors based on general community attractiveness and the high esteem of a related government body (i.e., school district) rather than the independent evaluation of each of the municipal trust factors.

Interpretation of Research Question 7 Results

Sub-research question seven investigated whether a moderating interaction (LOR) exerted influence on the relationships between the predictor variables and the criterion variable public trust. Results from the data analysis showed no statistically significant evidence of the interaction. Accordingly, each of the hypotheses ($H_{7(a\text{-}f)}$) were not supported. As such, no graphical depiction of the investigated interaction was generated.

Given that a previous study involving service providers and customers found support for the moderating effect of length of relationship (Coulter & Coulter, 2002), the researcher probed deeper as to possible contributors to the lack of support in this project when LOR was evaluated. One reason previously mentioned was the significant presence of multicollinearity. This deeper inquiry led to consideration of social desirability bias as a possible influencer. As regarded within scholarship, this bias is difficult to prove retrospectively (Gittelman et al., 2015). Although subsequent analysis results were not conclusive, they did provide evidence that less optimistic respondent assessments (tested first with average mean Likert scores of ≤ 6.0 and subsequently ≤ 5.0) were linked with diminished intercorrelation outcomes.

This finding implies that sample respondents with highly favorable assessments of trust predictors tended to not distinguish the difference between the predictors and trust itself. Practically, this was the result of survey scores wherein answers to trust predictor questions substantially matched those related to the trust items. Future attempts to investigate the hypothesized moderating interaction within a similar population may want to consider Nederhof's (1985) methods of coping with social desirability bias which include the use of a) forced-choice items, b) randomized response technique, c) bogus pipeline, d) self-administration of the questionnaire, e) selection of interviewers, and f) use of proxy subjects. Although no one approach eliminates social desirability, a focus on prevention methods offers the best choice available.

Implications

The process of evaluating and interpreting the research results brings forward several items deserving attention. The first is that LG civility, a broader version of politeness (Bonotti & Zech, 2021; Laden, 2019), and compassion have an important bearing on constituents and their respective level of public trust. Government scholars have found such to be the case and specifically propose that governments who provide interpersonal, civil, and empathetic public services experience improved public relations, a general condition thought to encourage public trust (Wagaman, & Segal, 2014). This proposal suggests an important practical implication for LG officials, representatives, and practitioners. When interacting with constituents, LG leaders are advised to emphasize their organization's interpersonal competencies and focus on the empathetic service behaviors signaling trustworthy LG services. To that point, LGs should consider adopting a collaboratively designed program, led by senior management, which targets effective empathetic service delivery (Sanger, 2008). More specifically, LG representatives should design that program with a proven person-related services model as their guide.

Motivated by the lack of government understanding of person-related factors' influence on public trust, Edlin (2021) proposed such a model to assist trust-improving government initiatives. Conceptually, the model organized public administration's focus on four areas as follows:

1. Create an empathic opportunity triggered by an explicitly or implicitly shared emotion;

2. Identify the shared emotion;

3. Make a connection with the emotion as the sharing-person experiences it; and

4. Communicate understanding from public servant to sharing-person.

By deploying an organization-wide civility initiative, a concrete practice aimed at improving the experience of both the service-giver (i.e., LG representative) and the service-receiver (constituents) was introduced and results in a more trustworthy LG (Dolamore, 2021).

Another practical implication is that of LG's reliability and its bearing on public trust. Mentioned in Chapter I, public trust was operationally defined as "the extent to which citizens have confidence in public institutions to operate in the best interests of society and its constituents" (Cleary & Stokes, 2006; Kim, 2005; Thomas, 1998). It makes implicit sense that, for society and its constituents to offer their trust, LG reliability is a prerequisite. Accordingly, LG leaders should be aware of factors contributing to sub-standard reliability. Scholars opined that reliability awareness, because of its influence on public trust, include areas such as e-communication and e-government (Kong et al., 2010; Suh et al., 2011), financial management and reporting (Loizides, 2013; Nogueira Martins & Gordo Mora, 2007), public service performance (Shaw, 1995), and general administrative information and transparency (Köseoğlu & Tuncer, 2016). When properly scrutinized for reliability and accuracy, the areas coalesce to create a social environment ripe for service-recipient trust and confidence (Macintosh, 2009).

Also worth discussing is the importance of tailoring and improving interpersonal, person-related services once a service relationship has been established with a resident (Coulter & Coulter, 2002). This relationship does not imply that the offer-related realm is unimportant. Rather, it raises collective awareness of the eminent value of customer care and its robust influence on constituent trust. This notion is one gaining tremendous scholastic attention including findings that person-related factors are the most predictive of constituent trust (Moorman, 1993). It follows that LG representatives should endeavor to understand residents' propensity to draw inferences from a LG service provider based on cues such as compassion or civility. With this understanding, it is incumbent on the LG representative to deliver services in a way that distinguishes from one who is uncaring or rude.

In keeping with the findings, the capability to deliver tailored and interpersonal services with prioritized care for courteous and kind interactions is vital to resident relations and improved public trust. Although constituents value competent, reliable, customized, and prompt public service, providing offer-related services reach their pinnacle value when delivered with personal care and attention to the customer's needs and expectations.

Limitations

Considering the modest but acceptable response rate within this type of study of 12.0% (Fox et al., 1988), it is important to note that the discoveries from this research are not entirely representative or generalizable as would more likely occur from a larger sample. When interpreting the results, it was necessary to apply some caution as they may not be fully generalizable as the reflection of trust factors' relationship with LG public trust. Yet, efforts to continue with the data analysis finds support within scholarship. For example, scholars argue that high response rates (greater than 50%) are now abnormal within academic research (Laguilles et al., 2011). Contemporarily, researchers are frequently finding response rates well below 40%. Other scholars discovered that the downward trend in response rates occurred irrespective of the research methodology since the 1980s (Dey, 1997). Couper (2000) adds to this point arguing that more expansive samples do not inevitably result in more valid responses. Adding more support, others opine that response bias is not necessarily embedded within moderate to small response rate results (Sax et al., 2003). Rindfuss et al. (2015) identified bias as more prone in smaller response rates when analysis targets an individual variable. Yet, when the focus is broadened to correlational relationships, the bias effects tend to diminish or even not occur (Dey, 1997).

Discussion on bias is also important given the representation of sample respondents versus recent census data. In Chapter IV, a comparison of the two was conducted revealing sample age ranges 30-39 and 40-49 were representative of the local population. However, as a percentage of total responses, responses for age ranges 50+ and 18-29 were significantly higher and lower, respectively, than the reported Whitehouse population. Because of the overrepresentation, assessments of the 50+ range, including unknown embedded biases, affected overall results more powerfully than if participation of the 50+ age range was closer to the known population. Conversely, the significant underrepresentation of the 18-29 age group rendered little to no influence on data results than compared if the group were more representative of the population.

Data reliability is also a topic worthy of attention. The research survey proved strongly reliable both in the original Coulter and Coulter (2002) version (see Appendix C) and the slightly modified version utilized in this research (Table 1). Both were assessed as strongly reliable with average internal consistency alpha scores above .90. However, Pearson product-moment correlations measured across predictor and dependent variables were also strong, indicating the presence of multicollinearity. The scores were so strongly correlated that it suggested respondents failed to discern differences between trust antecedents and trust itself. Mentioned in Chapter IV, this phenomenon likely contributed to the moderating hypotheses being unsupported. When probing deeper into potential multicollinearity contributors, subsequent analysis indicated that respondents with lower mean Likert responses distinguished differences between predictors and outcomes of public trust.

Given the research objective to examine relationships between proposed trust influencers and public trust, data assessments within this project are nonetheless significant with the potential to elucidate patterns existing within the sample. Scholars offer an explanation regarding the moderate response rate and lack of participant distinction between predictor and outcome variables (Aitken et al., 2008; Hoonakker & Carayon, 2009). Particularly, they suggest that contributing forces include a) the survey response perspicacity considered a low priority by participants, b) participants significantly influenced by response bias (particularly social desirability), c) intent to provide a survey response influenced by the respondent's ability to complete the survey, and d) technology challenges impacted the survey completion. These and other potential factors are discussed in this chapter.

Provided that this dissertation focused on a town with a population of 5,000 residents, it has limited generalizability value for larger cities. Noted previously, researchers acknowledge that the more proximate government is with the representative public, the more direct service delivery influences constituent trust (Christensen et al., 2020; Hendrix, 2019; Fredrickson, 1997; Job, 2005). In keeping with that notion, a large LG does not share the same proximity, and therefore trust factor relationship and composition, as with a smaller town (Sanger, 2008).

Another limitation is that the population from which the sample was drawn is generally characteristic of Midwestern, rural, and suburban demographics. Moreover, findings from this research may be limited for those seeking implications for more metropolitan and urban settings, and thus, broader generalizability. Noted by Sanger (2008), there are potentially a myriad of cultural differences between rural/suburban and metropolitan/urban settings that could make cross-generalizability problematic. Thus, extending any findings related to this study should be carefully considered when contemplating applicability within a broader, regionally-disparate LG context.

A further consideration suggests that a methodological flaw in this study may have contributed to the high multicollinearity. The methodology used included a single point in time for gathering respondent data. Specifically, the survey process called for responses wherein participants addressed both the predictor and the criterion variables at the same time. As such, it is possible that this condition allowed for simultaneous assessments of both the antecedents of trust and trust itself. With a goal of decreased multicollinearity, an improved methodology would include separating independent variable response items from the dependent variable items within the survey. This approach would include separating the survey into two parts with predictor items addressed at one point in time and the second part addressing outcome items at a different time (Spector, 2006). This suggestion presupposes that requiring respondents to interrupt the timing of answers may encourage greater distinction between predictor and criterion variables. As a result of this, it is anticipated that intercorrelation strength and the associated challenges would diminish.

In retrospect, an alternate survey process may have been better suited for this study. Participants received a physically mailed invitation by USPS. The letter included instructions on where and how to participate in an online survey. To register responses, participants had to type a web address to access the survey. Presumably, this influenced potential respondents in choosing to not engage. Of those that did respond, the response volume was highest among the age group 50+, the group registering the most optimistic LG assessment. This may suggest that an alternative method could have been more accommodating to younger age groups given that only 13.5% (18-29 = 1%, 30-39 = 12.5%) of respondents were under the age of 40. An improved approach would include sending e-invites via social media platforms and emails registered with Whitehouse. By doing this, potential respondents could access the survey by just clicking a link with no data entry requirement.

A final limitation is that this dissertation focuses exclusively on factors affecting trust *as viewed by the resident*. A more comprehensive study of trust antecedents should include research on the municipal side of the dyadic relationship as well. This would help ensure consistent evaluation across both sides of the public service and trust relationship.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research was intended to shed nascent-stage light on the issue of public trust in municipal government. Given the absence of attention given to this topic, there now exists a body of empirical knowledge upon which future research may extend. This is a unique opportunity to explore deeper and wider topics especially considering the public's amplified sensitivity to their government's trustworthiness (Corbett & Le Dantec, 2018) and the declining condition of public trust (Chanley et al., 2000; Pew Research Center 2021; Welch et al., 2005).

Provided that this study specifically explored residents' perspective of the LG and constituent relationship, it is recommended that future research evaluate both the constituent and the LG service provider viewpoints to determine contributing factors across both parties in the relationship (Ganesan, 1994). Additionally, this research focused on a small, Midwest town, with relatively little social, economic, and cultural diversity. It is feasible that the observed strength and direction of the public trust antecedents from this study may be unique as compared to other types and located municipalities. Moreover, it is recommended that future research adopt a similar investigation drawing from metropolitan/urban settings. This would be valuable, not only in investigating where results might be similar to rural/suburban, but also in examining why and how the results differ.

Another recommendation includes further research on the hypothesized length of relationship moderation. Even though the LOR moderation hypotheses were unsupported in this study, a significant contributor may have been linked to the presence of high multicollinearity. Factors affecting the level of multicollinearity could have included a) resident personal knowledge of the researcher, b) homogenous positive assessment of community by residents (i.e., leading to social desirability bias), and c) the survey delivery method (Aitken et al., 2008; Hoonakker & Carayon, 2009). Given that the topics of homogenous positive assessment and the survey delivery method have been discussed previously, attention is now devoted to familiarity with the researcher.

An advantage of having a municipal administrator conduct action research in the same town that he grew up and now manages is that he is known among the community. Accordingly, some respondents may have been more inclined to participate due to favorable social relationships with the researcher and his family than if there were no personal familiarity. Although being known may have contributed to the positive response rate, that same familiarity may have also led to respondents experiencing social desirability bias, and thus leading to overly optimistic responses when completing the survey (Caputo, 2017). Given this, a future study may experience diminished intercorrelation issues with an investigator lesser known among the respondent group.

Another consideration involves the relationship between the number of trust factors examined and associations with public trust. Due to high intercorrelations, the number of evaluated factors (6) in this research offered similar collective insights into their relationships with public trust as would be generated if fewer factors were examined. This is because the tested predictor variables were so highly correlated that they statistically operated as if they were one dimension. Accordingly, a study examining fewer factors would preserve the same value of the broader evaluation while also freeing up resources to delve deeper the investigated research question.

Across research domains, public trust is an immensely challenging concept not simply because it is a human construct prone to conceptual ambiguity (Barber, 1983; Bouckaert et al., 2002), but also that it is evolving in real time. The construct of trust, in general, has been the object of much attention across multiple disciplines including psychology, sociology, marketing, business, and political science. However, with respect to the field of municipal government, the idea of public service trust factors has never been studied and only a few articles have addressed service factors' impact on trust in other domains. Besides a broader inquiry intended to extend generalizability of this study, additional research on this topic is necessary in at least three areas.

First, there is a need for fuller development of how public trust is operationally understood. A challenge here is that public trust, a difficult construct to understand itself, is referent to the larger, more conceptualized construct of trust (Hardin, 1998). Although trust is a major topic in scholarly work, there still lacks a consensus on its definition and composition (Hupcey et al., 2001; Ping Li, 2012). Beside conceptualizations of trust, there is also a need to deeper understand triggers and outcomes of enhanced and diminished public trust. Even though there has been considerable effort primarily within the social sciences domain, the scholarly literature is still underdeveloped in terms of identifying broader antecedents and their relative influence on trust in government.

Second, there is a warrant for empirical research to be conducted over time. With extensive scholarly support (Birk, 2000; Palmer & Huo, 2013; Steier, 2001; Vanneste et al., 2014), trust is an ever-evolving construct, being subject to it is environment and context. It follows that environments and contexts involve phenomenon such as changes in social behavior and norms that subsequently impact trust over time (Barber, 1983). As scholars have observed, the sense of trust in government 70 years ago is not the same as is felt today (Peters, 1999; Welch et al., 2005). Logically, one can reasonably predict that public trust in the future will also change over time. Although this action research dissertation is the first foray into this worthy topic, it is nonetheless a picture taken within a particular time and population. Studies extending the depth and breadth of this topic are needed to evaluate the research questions across time and geography.

Additionally, utilizing a longitudinal research design would allow for tracking the influencing ebbs and flows of trust factors directly over time. From an action research perspective, LG leaders would gain valuable insight when comprehending changes in relationships between contributors to public trust and trust in general. Given that the data were skewed toward optimistic resident assessments (civility: $M = 7.93$ [out of 10] $SD = 2.23$, reliability: $M = 7.81$ $SD = 2.14$, promptness: $M = 7.67$ $SD = 2.22$, compassion: $M = 7.52$ $SD = 2.20$, competence: $M = 7.33$ $SD = 2.18$, customization: $M = 6.58$ $SD = 2.47$) at a distinct point in time (i.e., January 2022), the variable measures associated with those residents involved relatively few data points. A longitudinal study, conversely, would examine these assessments over multiple points in time, extending understanding of LG trust factor dynamics.

Because the study was conducted in a compressed point in time, the researcher was unable to ascertain whether the impact of the person and offer-related characteristics on public trust changed over time. Measurements, including the sub-group level, over time may reveal that survey responses include significant anomalies. This point is especially poignant considering that responses were gathered during a health and social pandemic (COVID 19 and attending variants). An extended inquiry, for example, may demonstrate that pandemic-related anxiety influenced residents' perspectives, a notion receiving much interest over the last two years (Bäuerle, et al., 2020; Goodwin et al., 2020; Mana, et al., 2021; Šrol, et al., 2021). Furthermore, the study of responses over time could uncover that particular trust factors only increase or diminish to limited extents. It is also possible that further study would show how such factors enhance or diminish as trust determinants yet remain unaffected by potential interactions like duration of relationships. These and other questions necessitate additional study.

Summary

The purpose of this dissertation was to understand the associations between LG service delivery and constituent public trust. In addition to evaluating these relationships, this project examined for the possible moderating interaction between length of constituent residency and public trust in LG. Moreover, this action research project provided not only a solid basis for further investigation into determinants of public trust, but also sought to provide scholarship and LG leaders with knowledge of where to focus trust-engendering efforts. The process and operational features of the study were described and defended in this chapter. Additionally, details of steps taken to ensure research rigor, reliability, validity, and credibility were presented throughout the manuscript. In due course, the objective of this research was to advance understanding of public trust-related matters that inform and inspire change-seeking action at the LG level. It was intended to serve as a foundational advancement in a domain with scant scholastic attention. Contrary to scholars' warning that research should not aim to change the world (Stake, 1995), this study attempts to spur on that very thing. This project may not by itself accomplish the end that Stake warned against. It may, however, serve as the scholastic starting point from which LG trust reform is initiated.

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APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SURVEY

Dear prospective participant,

My name is Jordan Daugherty and I am the Whitehouse Village Administrator. I am also a student at Bowling Green State University working on a Doctorate in Organization Development and Change degree. I am currently engaged in a research study titled “What is the impact of local government service factors on public trust?” I would greatly appreciate your willingness to participate in a 5-minute online survey. The only requirements for participation are you must be A) 18 years of age or older, and B) a current resident of the Village of Whitehouse.

This study examines aspects of local government public services that influence resident’s trust. This influence can be positive, negative, or neutral. As this research may not directly benefit you, a possible benefit of your participation is that leaders can take this information and make informed decisions in an effort to increase residents’ trust in their local government.

Please note that no information regarding your identification will be collected, so anonymity is guaranteed. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study is completely voluntary and will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University or the Village of Whitehouse. During the survey, you will not be at risk or in any danger. Also, you will be free to discontinue participating in the survey at any time.

If you decide to participate in the survey, please enter the full web address to reach the brief survey: www.qualtrics.com/jdaugherty.

If you have any questions regarding the study or would like to receive a summary of the findings, please feel free to email me at jdaughe@bgsu.edu.

I sincerely thank you for your time and effort.

With sincere appreciation,

Jordan D. Daugherty

APPENDIX B: SURVEY

Public Trust in Local Government Survey

Thank you for taking the time to answer some questions about public trust in local government. Results of this survey will provide necessary data for a research dissertation project aimed to understand factors that influence the public's trust in local government.

In the following survey, "local government service provider" refers to services offered by Whitehouse. Services such as water and sewer utilities, trash collection, police, fire/ems, street/snow maintenance, customer assistance, zoning, events, and parks and recreation are several types provided by Whitehouse.

General Information

	Female	**Male**			
Gender	○	○			
	18-29	**30-39**	**40-49**	**50-59**	**60+**
Age	○	○	○	○	○
	0-9	**10-19**	**20-29**	**30-39**	**40+**
Years of residency in Whitehouse	○	○	○	○	○

Please answer the following questions on a scale 1-10 where 1 indicates Highly Disagree and 10 is Highly Agree.

	Highly Disagree									**Highly Agree**
Trust	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**
My local government service provider is trustworthy	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider keeps my dealings with him/her confidential	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider is honest	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider has a great deal of integrity	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider brings high standards to his/her work	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider is a person with principles	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Empathy										
My local government service provider is caring	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider is warm	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider is friendly	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Politeness										
My local government service provider is polite	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider treats me with respect	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider is courteous	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Competence										
My local government service provider is an expert in his/her field	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider is extremely experienced	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Reliability										
My local government service provider provides promised service	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider is dependable	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Promptness										
My local government service provider deals promptly with my needs	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider deals with me in a timely manner	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider is punctual	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Customization										
My local government service provider provides me with well thought out alternatives suited to my unique needs	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider provides extremely customized services	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
My local government service provider works with me to define my particular needs	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

APPENDIX C: OFFER AND PERSON RELATED SCALE

Variable	Scale Items	Reliability
Trust	My service provider is trustworthy;	α = .91
Trust	My service provider keeps my dealings confidential;	
Trust	My service provider has a great deal of integrity;	
Trust	My service provider brings high standards to work;	
Trust	My service provider is a person with principles	
Empathy	My service provider is caring;	α = .92
Empathy	My service provider is warm;	
Empathy	My service provider is friendly	
Similarity	My service provider has values/beliefs similar to mine;	α = .94
Similarity	My service provider has preferences similar to mine;	
Similarity	My service provider is quite a bit like me	
Politeness	My service provider is polite;	α = .96
Politeness	My service provider treats me with respect;	
Politeness	My service provider is courteous	
Competence	My service provider is an expert in his/her field;	α = .86
Competence	My service provider is experienced in this business	
Reliability	My service provider provides promised services;	α = .85
Reliability	My service provider is dependable	
Promptness	My service provider deals promptly with my needs;	α = .93
Promptness	My service provider deals in a timely manner;	
Promptness	My service provider is punctual	
Customization	My service provider offers alternatives for my needs;	α = .91
Customization	My service provider provides customized services;	
Customization	My service provider help define my particular needs	