CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY AT LICENSING SERVICE CENTRES WITHIN THE CITY OF TSHWANE MUNICIPALITY

by

Pebetsi Cleopatra Hlaka

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Supervisor: Mr R. Machado

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DECLARATION

I declare that the study on “Consumer perceptions of service quality at Licensing Service Centres within the City of Tshwane Municipality”, was submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Commerce in the field of Business Management with specialisation in Marketing and Retail Management, at the University of South Africa (UNISA), is my own work and that all sources used within this research study have been acknowledged in the list of references.

PCHlaka.   September 2020

Ms PC Hlaka

Student Number: 48774871

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ABSTRACT

Public sector organisations are facing challenges in the delivery of quality service to public consumers. Poor service delivery at licensing service centres is a daily topic discussed by the public and media. The aim of this research study was to determine how consumers perceive the service quality at the Licensing Service Centres within the City of Tshwane municipality. The study focused on three Licensing Service Centres in Tshwane, namely, Waltloo, Akasia and Centurion, as they offer licensing services to public consumers. The study followed a quantitative approach to achieve the research objectives. A non-probability convenience sampling method was adopted to collect the primary data. A total of 350 respondents who visited the Licensing Service Centres to acquire the service were asked to participate in this study. The respondents were required to rate the level of service at the Licensing Service Centres. The SERVPERF instrument was utilised to measure service quality at the Licensing Service Centres. The study used a structured questionnaire to collect the data from the respondents The descriptive data analysis method was used to analyse the primary data with the aid of the statistical software package, SPSS. The reliability of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha values. The findings revealed that all service quality dimensions were rated average, meaning the consumers are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the level of service offered at the Licensing Service Centres. The study made recommendations for the continuous improvement of the service at the Licensing Service Centres.

Key words: Service quality, Private and public sectors, Perceptions, Consumer behaviour, Licensing Service Centres, SERVPERF, SERVQUAL.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

The following abbreviations are used throughout the study.

COT	City of Tshwane
e-NATIS	Electronic National Traffic Information System
LSC	Licensing Service Centre
RA	Registering Authority
DLTC	Driver Licence Testing Centre
VTS	Vehicle Testing Station
PrDP	Professional Driving Permits

CHAPTER 1:
ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The challenge of supplying satisfactory service delivery at the local/municipal sphere of government is currently an area of focus for many researchers and government organisations (Nene, 2016:19). The service delivery at licensing service centres is a topic that is regularly discussed by citizens and consumers in the media. There have been numerous media and consumers reports about poor service delivery at the licensing service centres (Jenkins, 2014; Makhetha, 2015; Thlabye & Motumi, 2015). Therefore, municipalities have to address the challenge of how to improve the provision of these types of services to their communities/consumers (Mpofu, Kendrick & Hlatywayo, 2015:133).

This study focused on the licensing service centres that operate as service organisations under the local/municipal sphere of government. The purpose of this study was to determine consumers' perceptions of the quality of service that is being offered at the licensing service centres within the City of Tshwane Municipality.

This chapter provides an overview of the study, by discussing private and public sector organisations, and the background to licensing service centres. This is followed by a discussion of service quality, the service quality dimensions, the SERVPERF model, as an instrument to measure service quality, and the concept of consumer perceptions. Thereafter, the problem statement, research objectives and the significance of the study are presented. Finally, the chapter provides a brief discussion of the research methodology employed in the study; this is followed by a discussion of the study's limitations, ethical implications and the outline of the chapter.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This section provides an overview of private and public sector organisations, licensing service centres, and the role that service quality and consumer perceptions play at licensing service centres.

1.2.1 Private and public sector organisations

Service quality is an important concept in both private and public sector organisations (Rana, Mahmood, Sandhu & Kanwal, 2015:660; Paul, Mittal & Srivastav, 2015:606). Diedericks, De Klerk and Bevan-Dye (2015:161) stated that quality service delivery is considered as an important strategy in the success and survival of any private or public sector organisation. The term ‘private sector’ refers to organisations that are owned by private agents, whereas the term ‘public sector’ means the government-owned organisations and government-provided services (Hvidman & Anderson, 2015:113).

According to Poczter (2017:368), the difference between private and public sector organisations is describe by the type of ownership. Khan and Khandaker (2016:2874) alluded that private and public organisations differ in goals. For example, the goal of private sector organisations is to make profits, while public sector organisations focus on delivering services to the public or citizens within a particular country (Reichard & Van Helden, 2015:7). Khan and Khandaker (2016:2877) added that private sector organisations work in an unstable competitive market environment, unlike public sector organisations that operate in a non-competitive market and have a dominant position in their specific sector.

Despite the differences in private and public organisations, Mafini (2014:116) argued that both organisations are under pressure to transform their respective performances to improve service quality, which seems to be a challenge. However, Msosa (2015:1) pointed out that achieving service quality and satisfying consumers has been the target of all organisations over the past decade.

The next sub-sections discuss private and public sector organisations.

1.2.1.1 Private sector organisations

In private sector organisations, consumer satisfaction and loyalty are attained through the provision of high quality products and services that meet consumers’ needs and provide value for money (Roy & Saha, 2015:2). The realisation of consumer needs and the ability to deliver higher quality services are crucial to organisational success (Shirkavand, Hosseini & Mokhtarihesari, 2015:441). The scholars, Adedamola, Modupe and Ayodele (2016:318) pointed out that the success of private sector organisations lies in their ability to constantly address the needs of their consumers and maintain any competitive advantage they have that differentiates them from their competitors.

Competition plays an important role in private sector organisations as these organisations compete for the improvement of quality service and consumer satisfaction (Kitapci, Akdogan & Dortyol, 2014:161). Jones and Shandiz (2015:49) argued that organisations operating in the private sector have come to realise that they must understand their consumers, and use the opportunity to learn from them in terms of both their expectations and perceptions regarding service. Adedamola *et al.* (2016:319) added that having a better understanding of service quality from the perspective of both the organisation and the consumer would improve consumer loyalty and increase profitability.

1.2.1.2 Public sector organisations

Quality improvement in public service has become a major concern for government institutions all over the world in their efforts to provide the public with quality service (Diedericks *et al.*, 2015:161). Public sector organisations are under pressure to deliver quality service to the citizens/consumers and improve their efficiency (Fourie & Poggenpoel, 2017:169). Organisations operating in the public sector have also come to realise that they must ensure their services are soundly based on the needs and expectations of their stakeholders, communities, citizens and consumers, and that they are seen to provide quality service (Mashamaite, 2014:232; Roy & Saha, 2015:2).

It is also important for the public service sector in South Africa to improve the quality of its service delivery, not only by comparing its performance with other sectors within South Africa but also by positioning itself amongst the best in the world (Hanyane & Naidoo, 2015:241). Bessick (2016:1) argued that in order to improve service delivery, the public sector must aim to reach its objectives by increasing and improving accountability, transparency, efficiency, productivity and quality of service.

According to the White Paper on National Transport Policy (1996), transport services play a significant role in the social and economic development of a country, and the government has recognised transport as one of its main priority areas for socio-economic development. The White Paper on National Transport Policy (1996) further added that the vision for South African transport is to "provide safe, reliable, effective, efficient, and fully integrated transport operations and infrastructure which will meet the needs of freight and passenger consumers at improving the levels of service and cost”.

In terms of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), the South African government is constituted into three separate spheres, namely, the national, provincial and local spheres of government which are distinctive, interdependent and interrelated. The distinctive element indicates that each sphere exists in its own right, and makes final decisions on a defined range of functions for which it is fully accountable. Unathi, Von Solms and Gerber (2017:438) pointed out that the ‘interdependent and interrelated’ elements indicate the need for cooperation between the spheres of government. Although the local sphere has the powers to make and enforce its own laws (by-laws); it is still supervised by the national and provincial government (Unathi *et al.*, 2017:438). According to the National Land Transport Act (2009), the responsibilities of the three spheres of government are:

- **The national sphere of government** (for example, National Department of Roads and Transport) is responsible for the formulation of national policy and strategy, liaising with other government departments in the national sphere with responsibilities that impact transport issues, and monitoring provinces and municipalities that lack the capacity or resources to perform transport issues.
- **The provincial sphere of government** (for example, Gauteng Provincial Government/Gauteng Department of Transport) is responsible for the formulation of provincial transport policy and strategy within the framework of national policy and strategy, liaising with other government departments in the national and provincial spheres with responsibilities that impact on transport, and ensuring co-ordination between municipalities is effective and efficient.
- **The local/municipal sphere of government** (for example, City of Tshwane municipality) is responsible for developing the transport policy and strategy within its area based on national and provincial guidelines. This includes its vision for the area, ensuring co-ordination between departments and agencies in the municipal sphere, with responsibilities that impact on transport, passing municipal by-laws, and concluding agreements as appropriate in the municipal sphere.

This study focuses on the local/municipal sphere of government which is closest to the people and delivers service to its citizens/consumers. The Local Government Municipal Systems Act (32 of 2000), describes a municipality as an organ of the state within the local sphere of government that provides service to or for the benefit of the local community. As such, municipalities play an important role in service delivery. However, Ndebele and Lavhelani (2017:340) pointed out that there have been a large and growing number of public complaints and dissatisfaction with the quality of service delivery at the municipal level over the past years. Municipalities are therefore mandated to keep a good working relationship with their citizens/consumers and ensure that they deliver services that satisfy their basic needs (Constitution, 1996). Hanyane and Naidoo (2015:241) highlight that municipalities are the face of the government, and when they fail to perform their responsibilities, the impact escalates into other spheres of government. A detailed overview of licensing service centres is presented in the next section.

1.2.2 Licensing service centres

A licensing service centre (hereon referred to as LSC) operates in the public sector and local/municipal sphere of government and its major responsibility is to deliver quality licensing services to the public (Pietersen, 2015:254). Licensing services were firstly introduced in the United Kingdom by the Motor Car Act of 1903. The purpose of registering and licensing motor vehicles and issuing driver's licences was to identify vehicles and their owners or drivers (Motor Car Act, 1903). In addition, all motor vehicles had to be registered, display registration marks (number-plates) and had to be licensed on an annual basis, and the registration had to be done within their local government authority (Motor Car Act, 1903).

In South Africa, the same licensing service principles were adopted by the Road Traffic Act 29 of 1989 in order to make sure that vehicles are registered and licensed and that the drivers operating the vehicles are competent. The Road Traffic Act 29 of 1989 was repealed by the National Road Traffic Act 93 of 1996 which is still in effect. This study will focus on the LSCs within the City of Tshwane municipality.

Licensing services in local government (municipalities) is a competency of the national and provincial government, according to the National Road Traffic Act 93 of 1996. The National Land Transport Act (2009), state that due to the relationship between the various spheres of government, a province may enter into an agreement with one or more municipalities to provide the joint exercise or performance of their respective powers and functions. The department of roads and transport in the Gauteng provincial government has entered into a Service Level Agreement with the City of Tshwane (hereon referred to as COT) municipality to perform the registration and testing authority functions at service centres in the municipality (Service Level Agreement, 2012:1). An LSC is defined as the site agreed to by the provincial department of roads and transport at which the municipality provides registration and/or testing authority services to the public (Service Level Agreement, 2012:2).

As stated above, the COT municipality executes this function as an agent of the Gauteng provincial government and operates under strict terms and conditions, as stipulated in the Service Level Agreement, 2012. According to the Gauteng Provincial Road Traffic Act 10 of 1997, the agreement is renewed every five years, depending on the municipality's satisfactory performance (Service Level Agreement, 2012:3). In accordance with the Road Traffic Act 29 of 1989, the COT municipality appoints the registering and testing authority to perform the following functions:

- The Registering Authority (RA) deals with the electronic National Traffic Information System (e-NATIS) transactions and the administration related to ownership, titleholder change, renewal of motor vehicle licences, import/export of motor vehicles, and road usage, and other related matters.
- A Vehicle Testing Station (VTS) deals with e-NATIS transactions, administration and the physical testing of motor vehicles' roadworthiness and clearance.
- A Driving License Testing Centre (DLTC) deals with e-NATIS transactions and the administration related to testing driver competency, driver's licence card renewals, Professional Driving Permits (PrDP), (originally called Public Drivers Permit (PDP), the conversion of foreign driving licences and other related matters.

The Department of Transport and Road Traffic Management Corporation (RTMC) launched the Natis Online booking services on the 30 August 2018. Therefore, the consumers need to make an online booking at this site https://online.natis.gov.za in order to acquire other services at the LSCs. For example: the consumer need to apply online for their written leaners license test, driver's license test, driver's license card renewals and Professional Driving Permit (PrDP). After the slot has been secured, the consumer may visit the selected LSC to acquire the requested licensing service. The online booking is available for the mentioned services that are offered at the Driving License Testing Centre (DLTC). For other services that are offered at the Registering Authority (RA) for example, registration and renewal of motor vehicle licences, the consumers do not need to make an online booking. The consumer may visit or walk-in the LSCs and acquire the service.

According to Mbele (2016), there are 405 LSCs nationally, as listed in Table 1.1 below.

Table 1.1: Total number of registered LSCs nationally

Province	Number of registered LSCs
Gauteng	41
North West	27
Limpopo	35
Free State	61
Northern Cape	47
Eastern Cape	50
Western Cape	60
Mpumalanga	39
Kwazulu-Natal	45

Source: Author’s own compilation

The study focuses on the COT municipality in the Gauteng Province. The COT municipality has five licensing service centres that offer various licensing services (City of Tshwane, 2015). These are:

- Saambou licensing service centre offers bulk registration and licensing of motor vehicle services.
- Centurion licensing and testing centre offers registration and licensing of motor vehicles, driver’s licence tests and renewals, learner’s licence tests, PrDP applications and renewals, application and issue of instructor’s certificates to driving school instructors, and police clearance services.

- Station Square/Akasia testing centre offers registration and licensing of motor vehicles and driver's licence renewal services.
- Waltloo licensing and testing centre offers registration and licensing of motor vehicles, driver's licence tests and renewals, learner's licence tests, PrDP application and renewals, motor vehicle roadworthy tests, police clearance, and weighbridge of motor vehicle services.
- Metro-Police Headquarters offers all diplomatic registration and licensing services, registration of manufacture, importer and builder (MIB) vehicles, registration and licensing of governmental motor vehicles and vehicle finance services.

This study focuses on three LSCs, namely, Waltloo, Akasia and Centurion to determine the consumer perceptions of service quality, as the three offer the licensing services directly to the public (City of Tshwane, 2015). It is the responsibility of an LSC to serve the needs of the citizens/consumers of the municipality, and all the citizens/ consumers have a right to ensure that public entities (such as LSCs) provide them with public service delivery that satisfies or exceeds their needs (Mashamaite, 2014:232). In addition, the Constitution promotes and encourages service delivery in the public sectors that serves the citizens in a responsive manner and responds to their needs (Dzansi, 2016:871).

In 1997, in an effort to improve the quality and accessibility of public service, the Department of Public Services and Administration (DPSA) introduced the White Paper on the Transformation of Public Service Delivery that included the Batho-Pele principles. The Batho-Pele principles ('Putting People First') were introduced as part of public policy to transform service delivery in the public sectors, and it was an initiative to encourage public officials to be service-oriented, to strive for excellence in service delivery, and to commit to continuous service delivery improvements (Ngidi & Dorasamy, 2014:10). As a public sector organisation, the LSCs are guided by the Batho-Pele principles in terms of service delivery to its consumers.

The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service Delivery (1997) guides public officials (licensing employees) in terms of public service delivery while improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the service. The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service Delivery stipulates that public officials (licensing employees) should adhere to the following eight Batho-Pele principles during service encounters:

1. Every consumer is entitled to full accurate information about the public services rendered by the centres.
2. Consumers should be told what level and quality of public services they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect.
3. Public services should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give the consumers value for money.
4. The consumers should be informed about how the national and provincial departments are operated or run.
5. The consumers must also be consulted about the level and quality of the service they receive.
6. The consumers should be treated with courtesy and consideration.
7. Promised standard of service should be kept.
8. Every consumer is entitled to equal access to the services and should be treated fairly.

During his first State of the Nation Address in 2018, President Cyril Ramaphosa also emphasised that public officials should adhere to the Batho-Pele principles by putting people first (Times live, 2018). The President further called upon public officials to undertake their responsibilities of public service delivery with integrity, efficiency and diligence, and to do things correctly, completely and timeously (Times live, 2018). According to Mashamaite (2014:233), the Batho-Pele principles are aimed at establishing an interactive and responsive relationship between public officials (licensing employees) and consumers that inspires confidence in the delivery of quality public service. Service quality is discussed in the next section.

1.2.3 Service quality

As one of the growing sectors globally, the service industry plays an important role in the economy of many countries (Meesala & Paul, 2018:261). In today's globally competitive environment, quality service delivery is considered to be an important strategy for the success and survival of an organisation (Diedericks *et al.*, 2015:161). Deneke (2015:35) added that organisations have to demonstrate that they have the capacity to improve their service quality performance aimed at consumers in order to achieve their organisational goals and objectives.

Meesala and Paul (2018:261) maintain that service quality should be one of the primary concerns of any service organisation. It is not only important in gaining a competitive advantage over competitors, but is simply also a prerequisite for the survival of a service organisation (Khan, Tabassum & Jahan, 2014:112). Ushantha, Wijeratne and Samantha (2014:73) pointed out that the service literature interprets service quality as perceived quality, and the meaning is derived from the consumer's judgment about a service. Similarly, Anwowie, Amoako and Abrefa (2015:149) described service quality as the consumers' perceptions of how well a service provided by the organisation meets or exceeds their expectations. The authors further added that in order to realise consumer satisfaction through service quality, consumer's expectations and perceptions should be understood.

Khan *et al.* (2014:110) pointed out that consumers evaluate service quality through the comparison of perceived services and the services they actually receive. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985:47) identified five dimensions that consumers can use to evaluate service quality, namely, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. According to Jones and Shandiz (2015:52) and Rana *et al.* (2015:661), the five dimensions through which service quality can be assessed are discussed as:

- Tangibility: physical equipment and facilities, employee appearance;
- Reliability: capability to perform the promised service;
- Responsiveness: willingness and readiness to help consumers and deliver quick service;
- Assurance: courtesy and knowledge of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence; and
- Empathy: the caring, individualised attention that the employees provide to its consumers.

Shafiq, Naeem, Munawar and Fatima (2017:2) stated that various models have been developed over the years to measure service quality and they are discussed as follows:

- Grönroos (1984:36-40) developed a model for measuring perceived service quality, and implied that service quality is determined by three dimensions, namely, technical, functional and image. The first dimension, technical quality answers 'what' consumers receive as a result of interaction with the service organisation (Grönroos, 2015:96). The functional quality dimension refers to 'how' the consumers receive service from the organisation (Polyakova & Mirza, 2015:6). The third dimension, organisational image, is built up by both technical quality and functional quality (Boshoff, 2014:40).
- The SERVQUAL model was proposed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) to measure service quality within an organisation, and compares the levels of consumers' expectations and perceptions (Jain & Aggarwal, 2015:127). The SERVQUAL instrument comprises of 22 statements used to assess service quality through the service dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Each statement is used twice to measure both the consumer's perceptions and expectations (Pabedinskaite & Akstinaite, 2014:404). According to Parasuraman *et al.* (1988:22), service quality means the consumer's overall judgment of the excellence of the service, or the difference between the consumer's expectation and the actual service performed.
- Cronin and Taylor (1992:56) developed the SERVPERF model as a measuring instrument service quality measurement tool. This model was modified from the SERVQUAL model. The SERVPERF model only measures the actual perception-based items, rather than the expectations-based items of service quality (Abidin, 2015:237). Therefore, by excluding the measurement of consumer expectations, only 22 items remained to be assessed (Basiony, 2014:25). The SERVPERF model is simpler to manage as it measures the actual level of quality service performance (Abdelkrim & Salim, 2015:129).

Various studies using the SERVPERF model to measure service quality have found it to be a valid and flexible instrument with which to monitor and measure the quality of service (Akdere, Top & Tekingunduz, 2018:1-11; Diedericks *et al.*, 2015:161-171; Kontic, 2014:645-654; Manea & Iatagan, 2015:1735-1739). Based on the evidence of the application of the SERVPERF in previous studies, it is clear that the SERVPERF still remains a widely-used and popular instrument for measuring service quality (Adedamola *et al.*, 2016:318; Mackay & Major, 2017:1194-1224).

This study used the SERVPERF model to determine consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. Service quality will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, and the next section discusses consumer perceptions.

1.2.4 Consumer perceptions

Consumer perception is defined as the process by which consumers select, organise and interpret stimuli to the five human senses of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste to create a meaningful and logical picture of the world around them (Ling, D'Alessandro & Winzar, 2015:326). According to Singh (2017:78), perception allows consumers to absorb the information about the environment they are exposed to through each of the senses, and to interpret the information in a manner that they can easily understand. While two consumers may be exposed to the same situations, each consumer recognises, selects, organises and interprets the situation differently due to consumers' different needs (Blythe, 2014:118).

Consumer perception can be described as how consumers personally experience the quality of the service that is provided, whether they view it as favourable or unfavourable (Machado, 2014:14). Perception is personal in nature, and one consumer may perceive the service offered at the LSCs as favourable, while another consumer may perceive the service as being unfavourable. The perceptions and needs of consumers in providing quality service should be taken into account by LSCs. Renko and Druzijanic (2014:836) support this view in pointing out that service organisations must understand the concept of service quality from the consumer's point of view, and not from the organisation's point of view. Jones and Shandiz (2015:51) maintained that consumer perceptions related to service quality are determined by their experiences with the service, the expectations they bring to the service situation, and their perception of the quality of the service they have received. Consumer perceptions will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, and the problem statement of this study is provided in the next section.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The delivery of service quality has been considered as an important factor in the public sector organisations. Poor service delivery in municipalities result in dissatisfaction and complaints from the consumers. Municipalities are under pressure in providing the service that meets and exceeds consumers or citizens expectations. There have also been reports in the media, and consumer perceptions that have indicated the poor service delivery of LSCs (Lubbe; 2014; The Citizen, 2018). Based on the findings of the studies presented in Table 1.2 below and the previous literature discussed in the background to this study, it is apparent that service quality still remains a challenge.

Many studies have measured service quality in various sectors, however, there has been limited research conducted on service quality at the LSCs. The researcher searched through accredited articles and journals about service quality on databases, such as EBSCOhost, SAGE, Elsevier, ProQuest, Emerald and Google Scholar. Service quality, perceptions, public and private sectors, and SERVPERF were the key words used when searching for the journals.

Table 1.2 in the next page presents a summary of previous research that investigated service quality.

Table 1.2: Previous research on service quality

Authors	Study	Findings
Moletsane, de Klerk and Bevan-Dye (2014)	The research determined the community's expectations and perceptions of the quality of service delivery by a South African municipality.	The results showed a negative perceptions of the quality of services delivered by the municipality.
Vilakazi and Govender (2014)	The purpose of the study was to determine the commuters' perceptions of public transport services in Johannesburg, South Africa.	The results revealed that the mini-bus taxis were perceived as being less confortable, less safe and less reliable yet their services were being used more frequently.
Yousapronpaiboon (2014)	The study investigated service quality in higher education in Thailand.	The results of this study revealed that the higher education in Thailand did not meet the expectations of undergraduate students.
Hanyane and Naidoo (2015)	The study investigated the perceptions of municipal employees in Limpopo, South Africa regarding service delivery and governance at the local government level.	The findings revealed that public service delivery remains a challenge in the Limpopo municipalities.
Molepo, Maleka and Khalo (2015)	The study focused on public participation and service delivery in the municipality.	The results revealed that City of Tshwane municipality does not always adhere to the constitutional and legislative requirements for public participation.
Rana *et al.* (2015)	The study aimed to assess the service quality of private and public banks in Pakistan.	The results of this study indicated that in contrast to public banks, private banks have greater satisfactory perception in terms of service quality, whereas consumers of private banks are more satisfied.
Sahin and Ergin (2015)	The study examined the relationship between selected factors of service quality delivered by Turkish municipalities employees and customer satisfaction.	The results indicated that informing was perceived as the most important factor for both citizens and workers. Physical appearance, politeness and trust are at lower positive levels when comparing them with other factors
Ganiyu (2016)	The study investigated the service quality dimensions in the Nigerian airline industry.	The findings revealed that the perceived service quality of domestic airlines across the dimensions was found to be poor.
Tabaku and Cerri (2016)	The study aimed to offer an empirical examination of the	The results indicated the significant importance of the tourists'

Authors	Study	Findings
	service quality offered by hotels on the Albanian coast.	perceptions about service quality and the significant impact of the perceived service quality on customer satisfaction in terms of hotel quests.
Luke and Heyns (2017)	The study measured commuters' perceptions of the service quality of selected public bus services in the City of Johannesburg.	The findings indicated gaps in some of the dimensions, and a number of attributes were identified as having influenced the perception of service quality significantly enough to lead to customer satisfaction.
Qazi, Mumtaz and Sajjad (2017)	The objective of the study was to evaluate the quality of dental service at a public hospital in Islamabad.	The results showed the greatest gap score in the dimensions of tangibility and responsiveness.
Dsouza, Pillai, Chen & Weiermair (2018)	The purpose of the study was to analyse the service quality and customer satisfaction of the banking sector in Goa.	The results revealed that customers are not satisfied with services provided by public as well as private sector banks.
Ali (2018)	The study explored the customer perception of service quality between Islamic and conventional banks.	The findings of the study revealed that Islamic banking customers had better service quality perceptions, and were more satisfied in terms of the provided service compared to conventional bank customers.
Rao and Rao (2018)	The study aimed to measure the employees' perception of service quality at public sector banks.	The results revealed that the four dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness and assurance influence the perception of service quality, except empathy.
Hamid and Yip (2019)	The purpose of the study was to identify the differences that exist between in the perception of service quality in public and private distance education institutions in Malaysia.	The results indicated that the students' perception of service quality is lower in all five dimensions of service quality in private universities.
Mbassi, Mbarga and Ndeme (2019)	The purpose of this study was to identify, describe and evaluate the relationship between public service quality and citizen-clients satisfaction in local municipalities in Cameroon.	The results showed that all aspects of service quality do not contribute to clients or consumers' satisfaction.

Authors	Study	Findings
Matthews and Takalani (2019)	The aim to the study was to analyse commuter's perceptions of service quality on a PUTCO bus route in the City of Tshwane.	The findings revealed that PUTCO failed to meet commuters expectation in areas such as reliability, extent of service, comfort, safety and affordability.
Kansara (2020)	The study measured the quality of services offered by the water supply department of a municipal corporation.	The results showed that there was a gap between what the consumer of service was expecting and what was actually delivered.

Source: Author's own compilation

The studies listed in Table 1.2 indicated that many studies have been conducted measuring service quality within the private sector (Ganiyu, 2016; Dsouza *et al.,* 2018), public sector (Moletsane et al., 2014; Qazi *et al.,* 2017; Rao & Rao, 2018) internationally (Yousapronpaiboon, 2014; Rana *et al.,* 2015; Sahin & Ergin, 2015; Mbassi et al., 2019; Kansara, 2020) and locally (Molepo et al., 2015; Matthews & Takalani, 2019; Hanyane & Naidoo, 2015; Luke & Heyns, 2017). However, limited studies have been conducted on service quality within LSCs and this created a gap for this study.

The problem statement of this study is that limited research has been conducted on service quality, specifically in LSCs. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap by determining consumers' perceptions of service quality at LSCs within the COT municipality. The primary and secondary research objectives of this study are presented below.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This section outlines the primary objective, which represents the main objective of this study, and the secondary research objectives developed for this study.

1.4.1 Primary research objective

The primary objective of this study was to determine consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality.

1.4.2 Secondary research objectives

The secondary research objectives for this study were as follows:

- To determine consumer perceptions of all the tangible aspects at the LSCs.
- To assess the level of employees' reliability as perceived by LSCs' consumers.
- To examine consumer perceptions of employees' responsiveness at the LSCs.
- To measure the level of employees' assurance as perceived by consumers at the LSCs.
- To evaluate consumer perceptions regarding the employees' empathy at the LSCs.
- To establish the differences in the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs in terms of their gender, age and race.

Having identified the objectives that the study aimed to achieve, the following section highlights the significance of the study.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Service quality plays an important role in an organisation's success and consumers' satisfaction (Boshoff, 2014:41). For any organisation to be successful, it is critical that its employees render quality service on a continuous basis to ensure that their consumers are satisfied (Nell & Cant, 2014:66). This study makes a contribution to improving the service delivery at the LSCs, and the consumers' perceptions will also make employees aware of areas of service at the LSC's that need attention and improvement.

The perceptions that a consumer holds about a given service is an important factor in deciding which quality enhancement measures to adopt (Asembo, 2014:47). The findings of this study will contribute to the expansion of the theoretical field of service quality in South Africa. It will also play an important role in identifying any service quality challenges that exist at the LSCs, and further enable recommendations to be made to enhance service quality. The next section focuses on the research methodology that was employed in the study.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology explains the process of how the research will be conducted to solve the research problem in hand (Allen, 2017:2). After the research problem and objectives are set, the researcher will determine whether the problem will be answered using primary data or secondary data. Primary data refers to the data the researcher collects to address the research problem at hand, and it involves raw data without interpretation by a second party (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015:130). Secondary data refers to the information that already exists and which was collected by someone else other than the current researcher (Kumar, 2015:117). Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard (2014:38) point out that secondary data is data that has been previously collected for some purpose other than solving the present problem.

In this study, the secondary data was used in the form of a literature review and was collected from textbooks, dissertations and articles from accredited journals, and publicly available sources from the media, for example, newspapers, the internet and government publications, such as Government Gazettes, National Traffic Acts and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. After reviewing the existing literature, the study collected primary data to determine the consumers' perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. The next section discusses the research design of the study.

1.6.1 Research design

Research design is defined as the master plan that specifies the methods and procedures for collecting, analysing, interpreting and reporting data in research studies (Zikmund, Babin, Carr & Griffin, 2013:64). There are three types of research designs, namely, exploratory, descriptive, and causal research designs (Rahi, 2017:2), as discussed below.

- An exploratory research design is used when one is seeking insight into the general nature of the problem, the possible decision alternatives and relevant variables that need to be considered (Kumar, 2015:75). Rahi (2017:72) points out that exploratory research is useful when the researcher requires more information about a specific problem or opportunity at hand.

- A descriptive research design describes the specific details of a position, situation, respondents or phenomenon. A descriptive research design is also used to describe objects, people, groups or environments and attempts to answer who, what, where, when and how questions (Wiid & Diggines, 2013:56).
- A causal research design is used to discover cause-and-effect relationships between two or more variables (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:132).

For the purpose of this study, a descriptive research design was used as it aims to understand the specific situation in an identified population (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013:53). The purpose of this study was to determine consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality.

In collecting primary data, there are two research approaches that the researcher can follow, namely, a qualitative or a quantitative research approach (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019:4), as explained below.

- In qualitative research, the focus is on addressing the objectives through techniques that enable the researcher to present detailed interpretations about certain phenomena (Rahi, 2017:2). Barnham (2015:837) pointed out that qualitative research is used when an in-depth understanding of consumer behaviour, attitudes, and motivation is required, and to collect in-depth details on a particular topic.
- Quantitative research is described as a research approach that addresses research objectives through an empirical assessment that involves numerical measurement and analysis approaches (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013:134). Rahi (2017:2) points out that quantitative research involves the collection of primary data from a large number of respondents with the intention of generalising about a specific population, and the findings are subjected to mathematical analysis.

For the purpose of this study, a quantitative research approach was used to collect primary data. The research study required a more general understanding of a problem, was descriptive in nature, and fresh data related to the problem was collected from a large number of respondents, and their responses to questions were assessed (Zikmund *et al*, 2013:135). The study focused on determining the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. The method that the study used to collect the data is discussed next.

1.6.2 Data-collection method

After selecting a research design and approach, the next section describes how the researcher collected the data to achieve the research objectives. Baker (2014:152) described three ways in which a researcher can collect data:

- Experimental research examines the cause-and-effect relationship between variables and it is used in a causal research design (Edgar & Manz, 2017:132).
- Observation research is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of people, objects and occurrences without a researcher questioning or communicating with respondents (Bradley, 2013:126).
- Survey research is a research method used to collect information from individuals in order to achieve study objectives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014:195).

This study selected survey research as the appropriate data-collection method that would enable the study to achieve its objectives. Survey research provides a quick, efficient and accurate means of assessing information about a population, and it has the ability to reveal factors that are not directly observable, such as attitude (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:135).

The various types of survey that a researcher can use to collect data are personal, mail, telephone and online surveys (Kumar, 2015:205), as discussed below:

- Personal surveys – a survey that is conducted by a trained interviewer in a face-to-face encounter (Kumar, 2015:216). The respondents are usually intercepted at a specific location and asked to complete a questionnaire. This can be with or without the interviewer being present during the completion of a questionnaire.
- Mail surveys – a type of survey in which the questionnaire is mailed to the selected respondents, who complete the survey and mail it back using the postal service (Kumar, 2015:213).
- Telephone surveys – a survey in which the interviewer contacts and interviews the selected respondents on the telephone (Blythe, 2014:171).
- Online surveys – a survey method where the researcher delivers and collects the information from respondents using the internet as a platform (Edgar & Manz, 2017:137).

The personal survey method was used in this current study to collect primary data. The interviewer approached the respondents in a face-to-face encounter as they left the LSC, and asked them to participate in the survey.

1.6.3 Data-collection instrument

Due to a survey research being selected as the data-collection method, a questionnaire was used as the most appropriate instrument to collect the data. A questionnaire is a research tool or instrument that is used to collect data from respondents (Wiid & Diggines, 2013:162). Consumers were asked to participate in a survey and those who were willing to take part were given a questionnaire to complete.

Questionnaires are categorised into two types, namely, interviewer administered and self-administered questionnaires:

- Interviewer administered questionnaires: this is a type of survey in which the interviewer invites the respondents to answer questions asked by the interviewer about the specific study (Wiid & Diggines, 2013:119).
- Self-administered questionnaires: a survey in which the respondent takes the responsibility for reading and answering the questions (Kumar, 2015:207).

For the purpose of this study, a self-administered questionnaire was used as the data-collection instrument to collect primary data because it was the most cost-effective and quickest to administer (Babbie, 2016:278).

This study developed a questionnaire from the SERVPERF instrument proposed by Cronin and Taylor (1992:56), as it is a measuring instrument used to measure service quality (Manea & Iatagan, 2015:1736). Roy and Saha (2015:2) added that the SERVPERF measures service quality by using the perceptions of consumers. Abdelkrim and Salim (2015:129) point out that the SERVPERF model is simpler and easier to use because it measures only the actual perception-based items, rather than the expectations-based items of the service quality as discussed in Section 1.2.

The questionnaire included a cover letter describing the nature and purpose of the study, and an informed consent form. The questionnaire comprised of two sections: Section A contained 22 statements adapted from SERVPERF in which the respondents evaluate their perceptions according to the five dimensions of service quality. Section B included questions about demographics, including gender, age, race, educational level and occupation.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on 10 respondents selected randomly to determine whether the wording in the questionnaire was appropriate and clear. Zikmund *et al.* (2013:63) described a 'pre-test' as the testing of the questions on a small sample of respondents in order to improve the questionnaire by identifying and eliminating problems.

Reliability and validity should always be considered in questionnaire development (Brynard *et al.*, 2014:3). Reliability occurs when the instrument measures the same thing repeatedly and provides consistent results, and validity is all about the instrument's ability to actually measure what it is supposed to measure (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2014:31). For the purpose of this study, the questionnaire adopted from the SERVPERF instrument was tested for reliability and validity. The next section discusses the target population of the study.

1.6.4 Target population

The target population is defined as the group of individuals, elements or objects from which samples are taken for measurement (Rahi, 2017:3). The target population in this study is the Tshwane residents who visit the LSCs to acquire licensing services. After defining the target population, the sample frame needs to be identified. Wiid and Diggines (2013:183) described a sample frame as the list of all sample units from which the sample is to be drawn. However, the sample frame was not identified in this study as the researcher could not retrieve the list of consumers in the population that would be selected to participate. The consumers were asked to participate in the study after receiving service from the LSC. The survey was conducted at the three selected LSCs that offer services directly to the public, unlike the Saambou and Metro-Police Headquarter LSCs that offer bulk services to businesses and government departments (City of Tshwane, 2015).

1.6.5 Sampling method

After the target population had been identified, the sampling method for the study was selected. The sampling methods that a researcher can use are divided into two types, namely, probability and non-probability sampling (Baker, 2014:153).

A probability sampling method means that every individual of the population has an equal chance of being selected to be part of the sample, while with a non-probability sampling method, the likelihood of selecting every individual from the population is unknown (Kumar, 2015:275).

This study used a non-probability sampling method, as the researcher could not retrieve a list of consumers in the population that would be selected to participate. A convenience sampling technique was appropriate for the data collection because the respondents were easily accessible to the researcher. Kumar (2015:280) described convenience sampling as a non-probability sampling technique in which the respondents are selected because the researcher has easy access to them. The selection of consumers was based on their availability at the selected LSCs, their willingness to participate in this study, and that they met the desired characteristics. The desired characteristics of the respondent selected to participate in the research study were as follows:

- Consumers between the ages of 18 and 65 years of age;
- Consumers who reside within the Tshwane municipality and visit LSCs to acquire licensing services;
- Consumers who can read, write, speak and understand English;
- Consumers who were willing and had the time to participate in the study.

Furthermore, the following exclusion criteria applied to the respondents in the study:

- Consumers below the age of 18 or older than 65 years of age;
- Consumers who did not visit the LSCs within the COT municipality;
- Consumers who were unable to read, write, speak and understand English;
- Consumers who were not willing to participate in the study.

These respondents were excluded from the study as they may not possess the required data aiming to address the research objectives. In addition, males and females below 18 years of age do not have the legal right to give informed consent to participate in a research study, and their inclusion might have a negative ethical impact.

1.6.6 Sampling size

Sample size refers to a subset of elements from a large group of the population (Bradley, 2013:302). The study aimed to obtain a large sample size of 350 respondents, which was targeted at the three LSCs. Furthermore, in establishing an appropriate sample size, an analysis was undertaken of the sample size used by previous researchers in similar studies, such as that of Yousapronpaiboon (2014) (sample size of 350); Debasish and Dey (2015) (sample size of 300) and Dsouza *et al.* (2018) (sample size of 300). Based on these studies, a sample of 350 respondents was considered sufficient for the analysis of data to generate reliable findings.

1.6.7 Data analysis

The data was edited, coded and cleaned. The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), Version 25 for Windows software was used to analyse the captured data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise data of a sample across a wide range of variables using nominal, ordinal, interval scales and ratio. Descriptive analysis enables the researcher to calculate the mean, median, standard deviation and frequency distribution that can be presented numerically or by using graphs (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:527). The next section briefly discusses the limitations of this study.

1.7 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The following limitations were applicable to the study:

- This study only took place at the three selected LSCs that offer services directly to the public, rather than those that offer bulk services to businesses and government departments.
- The sample was drawn from consumers who reside within the COT municipality, and it was therefore not geographically representative.
- The study used a non-probability convenience sampling method, therefore the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the entire population, the LSCs in other provinces, or the whole South Africa.

The next section discusses the ethical considerations that applied when conducting the study.

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The rights, values and interests of the respondents were respected while conducting this research. Ethical clearance to conduct the research study was obtained from the Department of Marketing and Retail Management at the University of South Africa (Appendix A). The researcher applied for and received authorisation from the COT management to conduct the research at the LSCs within the COT municipality (Appendix C).

The study complied with the ethical measures of research, as proposed by the University of South Africa (2013:3). The following measures were adhered to during the research process:

- The consumers were approached after receiving licensing services at the specified LSCs to request their participation in the study.
- The researcher obtained consent from the selected respondents and they were requested to sign the consent form to assure that the interviews would be handled with strict confidentiality and that the data collected would be held in confidence (Appendix D).
- The purpose of the research and the duration of the survey were outlined to the respondents.
- The laws and regulations required that the principle of transparency and consent be put into practice.
- The researcher ensured that the respondents were aware that participation in the proposed study was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw at any point without negative consequences.
- The research acknowledged the sources used in this study and did not copy other students' work, hence, the originality report is attached as (Appendix G).

The next section outlines the chapters of this study.

1.9 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This dissertation is structured as follows:

Chapter 1: This chapter provided an introduction to the study. It provided the background to the LSCs within the COT municipality, the problem statement, the research objectives, the significance of the study, research methodology, the limitations of the study, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 2: This chapter focuses on a review of the appropriate literature on service quality within service organisations. The concept of service and service quality, including the importance of service quality in the organisation are explored. The different service quality models are discussed with specific emphasis on the SERVPERF measurement instrument.

Chapter 3: This chapter discusses consumer perceptions regarding consumer buying behaviour related to service quality and the consumer decision-making process.

Chapter 4: This chapter focuses on the research methodology by presenting the research process followed by the study. The chapter includes an in-depth discussion of the research designs, data-collection approach, sample, sampling techniques, data-collection methods and data analysis technique used.

Chapter 5: This chapter presents the results of this study and comprises of the actual findings and the interpretation of the data.

Chapter 6: In this chapter the conclusion, recommendations and limitations based on research findings and suggestions for possible future studies are presented.

The next section provides the summary of this chapter.

1.10 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the study and highlighted the purpose of the study and what it aimed to achieve. It provided the background to the private and public sectors and the LSCs, specifically LSCs within the COT municipality. The research problem of this study, the research objectives and the significance of the study were discussed. The research methodology to be followed in order to realise the research objectives was then provided. Finally, the limitations of this study were provided, followed by a discussion of the ethical implications that need to be considered, and concluded with an outline of the chapters in the dissertation. The next chapter presents a detailed discussion of service quality.

CHAPTER 2:
SERVICE QUALITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Service organisations, both private and public, exist to provide goods and services to the consumers (Rauch, Collins, Nale & Barr, 2015:88). Organisations need to provide not just a service, but must also ensure that the service is satisfactory to the consumers and is available at the right time in the right place (Theron, Bothma & Du Toit, 2016:2). Delivering quality service is important for the service organisation's success and survival (Karim & Chowdhury, 2014:2; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2018:47). This chapter focuses on a review of the literature on service quality within organisations. The concepts service and service quality are defined and explained in detail. In addition, an explanation of the characteristics of service and the importance of the service quality dimensions and benefits are provided. Furthermore, the definitions of consumer expectations, perceptions, and consumer satisfaction are discussed. The various service quality models are then discussed with specific emphasis on the SERVPERF measurement instrument, followed by a summary of previous studies that serve as evidence of the application of the SERVPERF instrument as a reliable measurement tool used to measure service quality.

2.2 DEFINING SERVICE

Various scholars and researchers have presented a range of different definitions of service in the literature, despite a consensus on its characteristics (Msosa, 2015:12). Wirtz and Lovelock (2016:26) describe service as any activity or benefit that one party can offer another that is essentially intangible and that does not result in the ownership of an item. Marshall and Johnston (2015:265) define service as being a perishable product that represents a bundle of benefits that can satisfy consumer wants and needs, yet it does so without a physical form. Service can be described as deeds, processes and performances that create a relationship between the organisation and their consumers (Ramphal & Nicolaides, 2014:7). For the purpose of this study, this definition will be used as it means that the LSC employees create a relationship between their consumers by providing licensing services to them.

Marshall and Johnston (2015:265) state that the consumer realises that the value obtained from buying a service is not based on its physical attributes, but on the effect the service has on him or her in satisfying their wants and needs. Machado (2014:4) supports this statement by mentioning that the consumer expects a certain level of service with every purchase, and the level of expectation differs depending on the value of the type of service. Consumers visit an LSC with the expectation of receiving a high level of service with every licensing service they acquire. The next section discusses the characteristics of services.

2.2.1 Characteristics of services

Wirtz and Lovelock (2016:26) identified four distinct characteristics of services that differentiate them from products, as highlighted in the section above. The four characteristics of services are:

- **Intangibility**

  Intangibility is the most frequently mentioned of the various characteristics of a service. According to Wirtz and Lovelock (2016:26), this is the basic feature of a service, as a service is performed by an organisations employees, therefore performing a service gives it an intangible characteristic. Services are performances or actions that cannot be seen, felt, tasted or touched in the same manner that tangible goods or products can be sensed (Theron *et al.*, 2016:3). The intangibility of a service presents a challenge to organisations because it cannot be shown in a tangible way. Furthermore it cannot be readily displayed or easily communicated to consumers, resulting in consumer’s difficulty in accessing quality service (Kushwah & Bhargav, 2014:3). Intangibility at the LSCs can relate to all the untouchable attributes of the various licensing services, such as customer service relating to how employees treat consumers, actual licensing services, the fresh smell at the LSCs, and employees’ responsiveness to consumer queries.

  Polyakova and Mirza (2015:62) suggest that it is necessary for service organisations to make their service offerings more tangible, and often the quality of a service will then be assessed based on those tangible features. For example, when a consumer visits an LSC for a motor vehicle’s roadworthy test, most of what the licensing employee offers is intangible in the sense of processing the information. However, the ambience, the forms that have been completed and the roadworthy certificate are the tangible features of this service experience.

- **Inseparability**

Service occurs during an interaction between the service provider and the consumer (Kushwah & Bhargav, 2014:3). According to Iacobucci (2015:93), inseparability means a service cannot be separated from the provider, as it is produced and consumed simultaneously. The inseparability characteristic of service is also called “simultaneous production and consumption” and relates to the usual delivery of service in the presence of the consumer (Zeithaml, Bitner & Gremler, 2018:21).

Whether the inseparability characteristics are applicable to all services has been questioned, as other services can be performed without the consumer’s presence. Therefore a shift of focus on the provider-consumer interaction to co-production and co-creation was proposed (Olga & Mohammed, 2015:62). The authors further emphasised that it is the dynamic nature of services (activities, deeds, performance and experiences) that requires simultaneous production and consumption.

The challenge presented by the inseparability of a service includes the difficulty of mass production because of the service’s production and consumption occurring at the same time (Kushwah & Bhargav, 2014:3). For example, the service occurs during an interaction between the consumer and the LSC employee, therefore the consumer should be physically present at the LSC when tested for a driver’s licence.

- **Heterogeneity or variability**

Although human beings are actively involved in the process of the delivery and consumption of service, the act cannot be performed the same all the time (Theron *et al.,* 2016:4). Each service encounter will be different, depending on the time of performance or the circumstances in which the service is delivered. Consumers differ, and each of them will have a unique demand or perception of a service in a unique way (Kushwah & Bhargav, 2014:3). Due to a service being heterogeneous, the standardisation and consistency of the quality service provided is difficult to control (Ramphal & Nicolaides, 2014:9). For example, two different consumers may visit the LSC to renew a motor vehicle licence and be assisted by the same licensing employee, but each consumer's experience and perception of the service might differ. Consumers will rate the quality of service at the LSC differently, according to their own preferences. Providing the employees with proper training can help to ensure that consumers receive a standard level of service (Iacobucci, 2015:106).

- **Perishability**

  The fourth characteristic of a service is perishability, which refers to the fact that service cannot be stored, resold, returned or saved up (Iacobucci, 2015:93). Service production and service delivery go hand in hand (Ramphal & Nicolaides, 2014:8). However, the challenge lies in controlling the supply and demand levels, as the organisation will not be able to store the service for later use (Theron *et al.*, 2016:4). For example, the LSC employees should render the service right the first time, because the service offering cannot be inventoried or returned back to the LSC if the consumer is not satisfied.

With regard to the services provided at the LSCs, the employees should try to impress the consumer during every service encounter, create a relationship and make it easy for the consumers to receive quality service. In order to improve service quality provision at the LSCs, a clear understanding of service quality and its nature is required. The definition of service quality is discussed in the next section.

2.3 SERVICE QUALITY

In order to understand service quality, one must first understand customer service and quality. Customer service can be described as the interaction between the organisation and the consumer in the provision of service, before, during and after the purchase (Machado, 2014:3). Bucak (2014:1) defines quality as an ever-changing state associated with products, services, people, processes, and environments that meet or exceed expectations and that helps to produce superior value. The organisation should provide the quality of service that is able to meet and exceed consumer expectations (Singh & Prasher, 2019:284).

Service quality is one of the most researched and debated subjects in research literature, and has been defined differently by many authors (Kushwah & Bhargav, 2014:1). According to Marshall and Johnston (2015:278), service quality represents a formalisation of the measurement of the consumer's expectations of a service, compared to the perceptions of the actual service performance. Parasuraman *et al.* (1988:14) defined service quality as the discrepancy between the consumer's perceptions of the service offered by a particular organisation, and their expectations related to that service offering. Furthermore, Boshoff (2014:40) states that the definition of service quality implies that a good quality service is delivered when the service provider has met or exceeded the consumer's pre-service encounter expectations. If the expectations are not met, it implies that the service quality was poor.

Naidoo (2015:43) argued that service quality refers to the expected and perceived quality of the service offering. According to Green (2014:132), if a gap exists between the expected and the perceived service quality, the gap can be favourable or unfavourable. For example, if expectations are greater than perceptions, the perceived service quality will be less satisfactory and the gap will be unfavourable, while if the expectations are lower than the perceptions, the perceived service quality will be satisfactory and the gap will be favourable.

Grönroos (2015:94) emphasised that service quality is the comparison of the consumer's expectations and their perceptions of the service they actually received. Therefore the quality of service is dependent on two variables: expected service and perceived service. Mukhopadhyay (2016:5) supports the notion that perceived service quality stems from a comparison of what consumers feel service organisations should offer (expectations) with their perceptions regarding the actual performance of service. Wirtz and Lovelock (2016:551) define service quality from the consumer's perspective, as an organisation's high standard performance of service that consistently meets or exceeds consumer expectations.

Singh and Prasher (2019:284) described service quality as the consumers' perceptions of how well a service meets or exceeds their expectations, and it is judged by consumers and not organisations. This definition is appropriate for this study, as the purpose is to determine consumers' perceptions of the service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. The next section discusses the importance of service quality within a service organisation.

2.3.1 Importance of service quality

Research shows that service quality is often considered an important tool in an organisation's struggle to succeed (Karim & Chowdhury, 2014:1). It is critical for any successful organisation to provide outstanding quality of service on a continuous basis to ensure that their consumers are satisfied (Eresia-Eke, Stephanou & Swanepoel, 2018:2). If the perceived service of the organisation exceeds the expected service, consumers will use the service provider again and recommend the service provider to other consumers (Tabaku & Cerri, 2016:483).

Grönroos (2015:130) pointed out that the expected service is determined by the consumer's past experience, personal needs and word-of-mouth communication, whereas the service that the consumer has experienced refers to the perceived service. Consumers with the highest perception levels of service quality can contribute positively to the organisation's image via word-of-mouth communication (Dedeoglu & Demirer, 2015:134). For example, if consumers' perceptions of service quality at a selected LSC within the COT municipality meet or exceed their expectations, they continue their relationship with the service centre and may recommend it to other consumers.

The delivery of quality service is important for the survival of a service organisation, and it also paves the way for an efficient organisation (Boshoff, 2014:41; Jain & Aggarwal, 2015:126). Since consumers participate in the delivery and consumption of services, they interact closely with the service delivery aspects of the organisation (Gupta, Agarwal & Tyagi, 2014:43). When public sector organisations deliver quality services based on the needs of the consumers, they can increase public satisfaction (Dudley, Lin, Mancini & Ng, 2015:3). According to Bucak (2014:3), consumer satisfaction occurs if the consumer's expectations are exceeded. When the consumer's experience is poorer than expected, dissatisfaction occurs. In order to realise consumer satisfaction through service quality, the consumer's expectations and perceptions should be understood (Singh & Prasher, 2019:284). Consumer expectations are explained in the next section.

2.3.2 Consumer expectations

Consumer expectations play an important role in the evaluation of service quality (Faasen, 2015:11). Dedeoglu and Demirer (2015:131) add that service organisations should understand the basic features of consumer expectations, the development of such expectations, and the implications these expectations have on service quality. Consumer expectations may be described as the desires or wants of the consumers, and in essence, it means that consumer expectations are what the consumer expects from the service organisation (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015:114). Moreover, the expectations are based on the consumer's perceptions. If a consumer's previous experience with a service provider was negative, the consumer may approach a next service encounter with the expectation that he or she will again be disappointed (Karim & Chowdhury, 2014:3).

Machado (2014:12) states that consumer expectations are divided into primary expectations and secondary expectations. Primary expectations are the consumer's most basic requirements from an interaction, while secondary expectations are expectations based on the previous experiences that are enhancements to primary expectations (Machado, 2014:12). For example, consumers visit an LSC and their primary expectation is to acquire licensing services. Their secondary expectations are to receive quality service from LSC employees and be treated with respect and courtesy. The LSCs need to ensure that they provide quality services that match consumer expectations. Jones and Shandiz (2015:49) point out that organisations operating in the public sector (LSCs) have to understand that not only must they take care of their consumers but they must also learn about their expectations and perceptions of service. The next section describes consumer perceptions.

2.3.3 Consumer perceptions

Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015:114) define consumer perception as the process by which consumers select, organise and interpret stimuli or information into a meaningful and coherent picture. Two consumers may be exposed to the same situations (for example, a service encounter), but each consumer recognises, selects, organises and interprets the situation differently due to their different needs (Blythe, 2014:101). For example, two consumers may renew their motor vehicles licences at the same LSC and be assisted by the same officer, but their perception and interpretation of service will differ.

Msosa and Govender (2015:60) maintained that a service organisation should anticipate consumer resistance based on previous service encounters, and should also strive to provide consumers with excellent service so that the current perception becomes positive. Although consumers may not remember every detail with regards to a previous experience and only retain an overall feeling, that feeling, in combination with other experiences, creates the perceptions related to the organisation (Cohen, Prayag & Moital, 2014:885). Therefore, it can be said that consumers perceive services in terms of the quality of the services provided and the satisfaction level attained (Mahfooz, 2014:12). Consumer perceptions will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, the next section explains consumer satisfaction.

2.3.4 Consumer satisfaction

Satisfaction is defined as the overall response to a perceived discrepancy between consumers' perceptions of the service received and the desired expectations of the service (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2016:74). According to Mahfooz (2014:13), satisfaction takes place in two situations: one is the result of a product or actual service meeting the consumer's expectations, and the other is the result that exceeds the consumer's expectations.

Satisfaction is also described as the consumer's evaluation of whether service has met their needs and expectations (Gupta *et al.*, 2014:47; Machado, 2014:143). If the service received meets the consumer's needs and exceeds expectations, the consumer will be satisfied, but if the service fails to meet the consumer's expectations then the consumer is dissatisfied (Bucak, 2014:2). Baker (2014:70) added that when consumers are satisfied, they are more likely to return, while dissatisfied consumers are likely to go elsewhere. For example, if the consumers are not entirely satisfied with the licensing services rendered at the LSC, they are likely to go to another LSC within their local registering authority. The next section provides the link between service quality and consumer satisfaction.

2.3.5 The link between service quality and consumer satisfaction

Service quality is critically important in providing a competitive advantage to an organisation, as it influences various factors, such as consumer satisfaction (Dedeoglu & Demirer, 2015:131; Saneva & Chortoseva, 2018:47). According to Eresia-Eke *et al.* (2018:1), providing and maintaining service quality and consumer satisfaction are some of the biggest challenges in service organisations. Consumers perceive services in terms of the quality of services provided and the satisfaction level attained (Lone & Rehman, 2017:3). Satisfaction can be attained if the service quality is good or high, and vice versa (Christia & Ard, 2016:58). Similarly, Ahamed and Mohideen (2015:476) point out that service quality has a positive influence on consumer satisfaction. Consumers are likely to create a relationship with the employees provided they are satisfied with the quality of services offered by the organisation (Fatima & Razzaque, 2014:36).

Service quality and consumer satisfaction have become major focus areas for organisations because the organisations want to measure these factors. These two concepts are both measured through the gap approach, which involves determining the difference between expectations and perceptions (Meesala & Paul, 2016:2). Furthermore, the reason for the focus on quality of service and consumer satisfaction is the belief that organisations can differentiate themselves by means of providing better service quality and overall consumer satisfaction (Christia & Ard, 2016:58).

Figure 2.1 on the next page shows the link between service quality and consumer satisfaction.

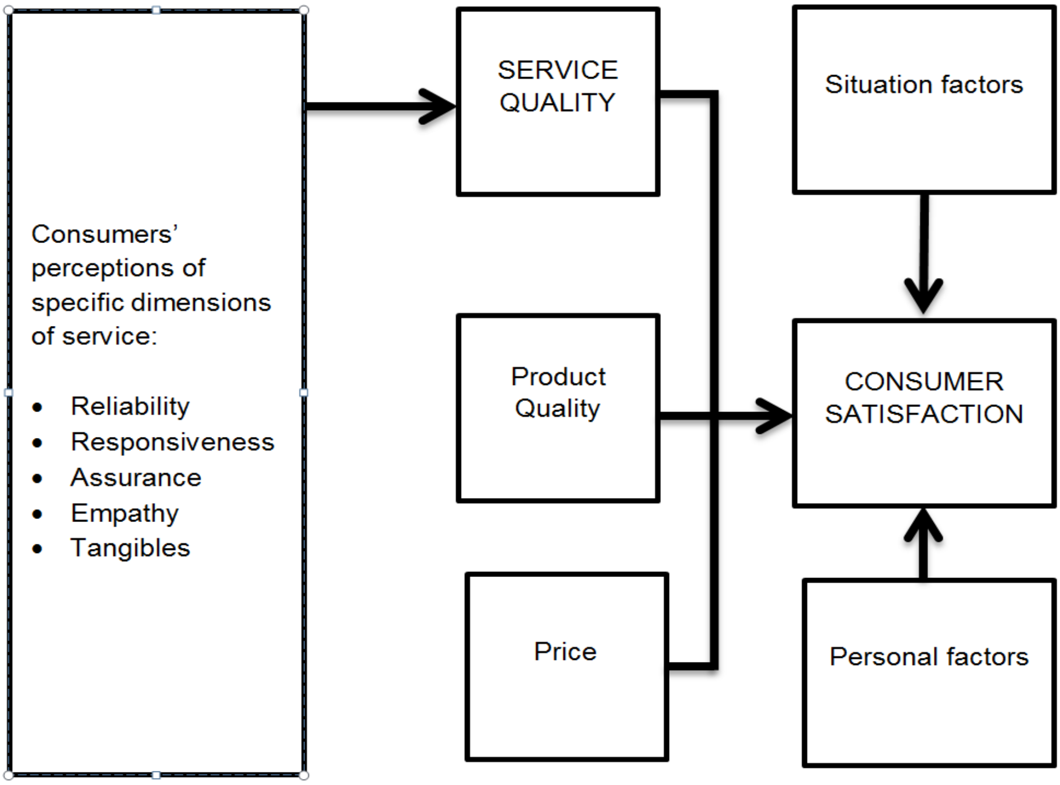

Figure 2.1: Link between service quality and consumer satisfaction

Source: Adapted from Zeithaml *et al.* (2018:79).

Figure 2.1 shows the link between service quality and consumer satisfaction. It presents a situation where service quality is a focused evaluation that reflects the consumer's perception of the service dimensions, namely, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Baker, 2014:70). Satisfaction is more inclusive, and it is influenced by the perceptions of service quality, product quality and price and situational factors, such as waiting time, and personal factors, such as the consumer's past experiences (Karim & Chowdhury, 2014:4). According to Deneke (2015:27), service quality can be assessed through the service quality dimensions that are discussed in the next section.

2.3.6 Dimensions of service quality

According to Basiony (2014:3), the only criteria that count in assessing service quality are those defined by the consumer. Service quality dimensions have been used by consumers to judge service quality, and this judgement results from comparing what a consumer believes a service provider should offer (expectations) and the consumer's perception of the actual performance of the service (Jain & Aggarwal, 2015:126).

Parasuraman *et al* (1985:47) introduced ten dimensions through which service quality can be assessed:

- **Reliability:** the ability of an organisation to perform its services in the proper time, and according to the promises it has made to its consumers.
- **Responsiveness:** concerns the willingness and readiness of the employees to help the consumers and satisfy their needs, attend to their enquiries, and solve their problems promptly.
- **Competence:** means possession of the required skills and knowledge that enable the employees to perform the service to the consumers.
- **Accessibility:** involves providing convenient access to a service in terms of location, waiting time to receive service, and through services provided via the telephone, the internet, or any means of communication.
- **Courtesy:** involves the politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness of an organisation's employees during service delivery.
- **Communication:** means informing the consumers in a language they can understand and listening to them attentively. The information about the service must be clearly conveyed to the consumers.
- **Credibility:** involves the employees having the consumer's interests at heart. This can be achieved through full honesty, respect, trust and confidence in the employees.
- **Security:** means the service is free from risk and danger. It also involves the financial security and confidentiality of the consumer's information.
- **Understanding/ knowing the consumer:** involves making the effort to understand the consumer's needs, to provide the individualised attention, and recognise regular consumers.
- **Tangibility:** it includes the physical evidence of the service, such as the physical appearance of the employees, the equipment used to provide the service, and physical facilities, such as adequate and satisfactory signage.

Basiony (2014:3) points out that as the assessments of service quality continued, Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) reduced the 10 dimensions to five unique dimensions (three original and two combined dimensions) through exploratory factor analysis.

These five dimensions include tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Nell & Cant, 2014:67). The last two dimensions (assurance and empathy) contain items representing seven original dimensions, namely, communication, credibility, security, competence, courtesy, understanding the consumer, and access that did not remain after scale purification (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988:23).

For the purpose of this study, these five unique dimensions will be used to assess the service quality at the LSCs. The five dimensions through which service quality can be assessed (Jones & Shandiz, 2015:52) are discussed in the sub-sections below.

2.3.6.1 Tangibility

Due to the nature of services being intangible, it is difficult for consumers to evaluate services, and therefore, consumers often rely on the tangible evidence that surrounds the service in forming their evaluations (Jones & Shandiz, 2015:54). Tangibility refers to the consumer's perception that all the tangible aspects of the service, such as appearance of the facilities, equipment and documents are fit for the task and are consumer friendly (Green, 2014:133). The physical appearance of the employees is also an element of tangibility, and the employee's appearance should be neat and tidy (Ismail & Yunan, 2016:269).

Tangibles provide physical representations or images of the service that consumers, particularly new consumers, will use to evaluate the quality (Anwowie *et al.*, 2015:149). Service organisations use tangibles to enhance their image, provide continuity, and signal quality to consumers. The LSCs should have modern equipment and technology to keep records of consumers' accounts efficiently, and the physical facilities should be visually appealing.

2.3.6.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the organisation's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately (Ramphal & Nicolaides, 2014:4). Out of the five dimensions, reliability is considered to be the most important determinant of the perception of service quality among consumers (Anwowie *et al.*, 2015:151). Consumers want to do business with the organisations that keep its promises and performs the service right the first time (Msosa, 2015:25).

Service organisations have adopted service delivery agreements and service charters that define their projected levels of service quality (Pietersen, 2014:255). The LSC employees should adhere to the Batho-Pele principles during service encounters as promised to the consumers. According to The White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service Delivery (1997), the promises to deliver the service should always be kept.

2.3.6.3 Responsiveness

Responsiveness is the willingness to help and respond to the consumer's needs (Hung, 2016:56). The organisation's employees must be willing to help consumers and provide prompt service. The responsiveness dimension focuses on attentiveness, promptness and willingness in dealing with consumer requests, enquiries and complaints (Wirtz & Lovelock, 2016:80). According to Basiony (2014:3), the responsiveness dimension reflects a service organisation's willingness to help and provide services in a timely manner.

The LSC employees should always be willing to help the consumers and avoid keeping them waiting for a long time because failure to respond will have a negative impact on consumers' perceptions towards service quality at the LSC.

2.3.6.4 Assurance

Assurance refers to the knowledge and courtesy of employees, and their ability to inspire trust and confidence to the consumers (Abdelkrim & Salim, 2015:128). This dimension is associated with the service provider's capability of delivering output, especially in terms of the knowledge, politeness and trustworthiness of the employees (Mukhles, 2016:190). The assurance dimension is likely to be particularly important for services that consumers perceive as high risk because consumers feel uncertain about their ability to evaluate the outcomes (Anwowie *et al.*, 2015:151).

The consumers expect LSC employees to provide security for their information. The LSCs' consumers should feel safe and have confidence that their information is protected at all times, for example, their residential addresses and vehicle information. Furthermore, consumers prefer to deal with employees who have sufficient knowledge of the licensing services.

2.3.6.5 Empathy

Empathy refers to the caring and the degree to which consumers receive individualised service from employees (Boshoff, 2014:42). According to Msosa,(2015:26), empathy is about understanding the consumer's personal needs, taking care of them individually and showing them sympathy. The number of consumers that the service provider has to deal with at one given time has an influence on the level of individual attention given to each consumer (Khan *et al.*, 2014:113).

Every consumer at the LSC should be assisted with care, respect and receive individualised attention from the employees. The LSCs' employees should also attend to consumers once their specific needs are known.

The next section discusses the benefits of providing a quality service in all aspects of service rendered by organisations.

2.3.7 Benefits of service quality

Khan *et al.* (2014:112) and Deneke (2015:35) highlight that providing superior service quality in an organisation can lead to the following benefits:

- **Increased revenue:** If the organisation provides the quality service that consumers perceive as high in standard, consumers will be encouraged to spend more.
- **Improved organisational reputation:** The organisation that becomes famous for delivering high quality service gains a positive reputation in the market. For example, a LSC that is known for providing superior service to consumers gains an improved image in the market through word-of-mouth.
- **Increased employee productivity:** High quality service assists in retaining competent employees, which contributes towards high productivity. For example, through continuous high quality service provision, LSCs can improve employee productivity.
- **Improved customer satisfaction:** If the organisation provides high-quality service, the consumers' needs will be met, which will present the possibility of consumer satisfaction. For example, if LSCs continue to provide superior service to

consumers, the consumers' needs will probably be met, which will in turn, likely contribute towards consumer satisfaction.

- **Customer loyalty:** When consumers continuously receive superior quality service, they are likely to develop a long-term relationship with the organisations. Customer satisfaction leads to positive results, especially in predicting future intentions to use a service. This implies that LSCs can also have long-term relationships with consumers enjoying continuous quality service provided. The next section discusses the various models used to measure service quality.

2.4 SERVICE QUALITY MODELS

Service quality has become a major focus area in service organisations due to its impact on consumer satisfaction, business performance and profitability (Clapton, 2013:42). Pabedinskaite and Akstinaite (2014:404), and Kushwah and Bhargav (2014:1) argued that measuring service quality is a challenging and complex problem which has been the focus of extensive research, though there is still no consensus in the literature with regards to the criteria that should be employed to measure it. Various models, namely, the Grönroos model, the Kano model, the Brady and Cronin hierarchical model, the SERVPERF model, the SERVQUAL model and the Gap model have been developed over the years to measure service quality and are briefly discussed in the next section.

2.4.1 The Grönroos model

Grönroos (1984:36-40) developed a model for measuring perceived service quality, and implied that service quality is determined by three dimensions, namely:

- What was received: termed 'technical quality';
- How it was received: termed 'functional quality'; and
- Image of the service organisation.

The Grönroos model is illustrated in Figure 2.2 below as a service quality measuring instrument.

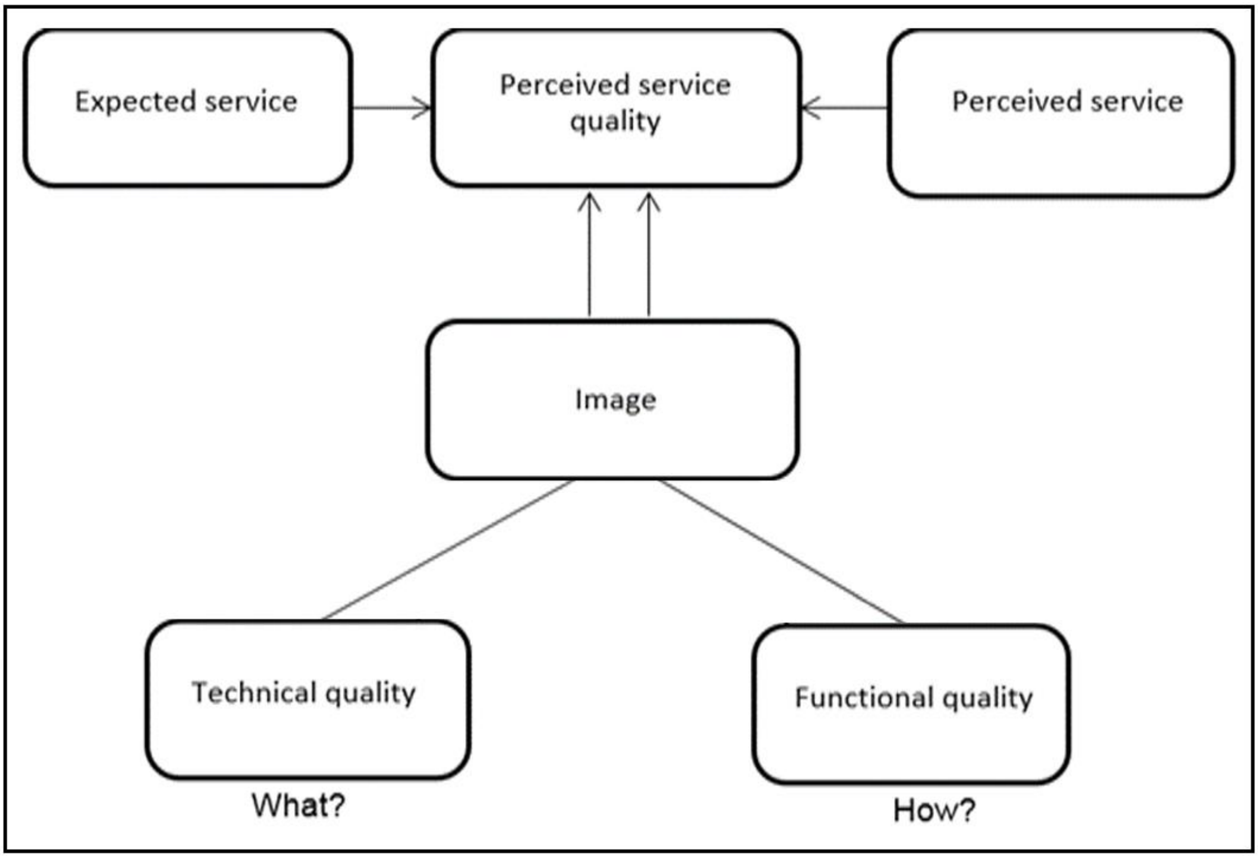

Figure 2.2: The Grönroos service quality model

Source: Grönroos (1984:40)

The first dimension, technical quality answers ‘what’ consumers receive as a result of interaction with the service organisation (Grönroos, 2015:96). The example of technical quality includes the amount of time the consumer waits to receive the service, the number of employees the consumer was referred to before being assisted, and the advice given by the employees.

Functional quality is another dimension of quality, and it refers to ‘how’ the consumers receive service from the organisation (Yarimoglu, 2014:81). The examples of functional quality include the friendliness of employees, the knowledge of the employee, the effective and efficient manner in which the employee delivers the service to the consumer. The service delivery process is important in the consumer’s evaluation of the service quality. However, the service outcome received by the consumer is as a result of their desire and the process of receiving service influences the consumer’s evaluation and view of the service (Ghotbabadi, Feiz & Baharun, 2015:271). According to Grönroos (1984:37), the perceived quality of a service is the outcome of an evaluation process, whereby the consumer compares his/her expectations with the service he/she perceives he/she has received. In other words, when the consumer compares the perceived service with the expected service, we get perceived service quality, as shown in Figure 2.2.

The third dimension, organisational image, is built up by both technical quality and functional quality (Boshoff, 2014:40). The consumers' expectations are influenced by their view of the organisation, and its image is the result of how consumers perceive the organisation. Failure in terms of technical or functional quality can affect the image of the organisation in a negative way and also affect the consumers' perceptions towards the service quality of the organisation (Faasen, 2015:23). For example, strong technical and functional quality will improve the consumers' perceptions towards the image of the organisation.

The main problem of this model is that it only laid down the components of service quality as technical, functional and image, without mentioning the techniques or tools to measure these components (Jain & Aggarwal, 2015:131). The next section provides the explanation of the Kano model.

2.4.2 Kano's model

Kano's model was developed in 1984 to identify and classify the attributes of a product or service, based on how well they are able to satisfy consumer's needs in the organisation (Rahmana, Kamil, Soemantri & Olim, 2014:60). The model provides insight into the product or service attributes which are perceived as important by consumers (Gupta *et al*., 2014:47). The products or services with attributes that satisfy and delight the consumers are perceived as being of quality by them (Mkpojiogu & Hashim, 2016:2). Rahmana *et al.* (2014:62) pointed out that since the Kano's model was introduced, it became one of the most popular models to measure quality, and has been used in a wide range of industries. According to Mokonyama (2015:2-12) and Madzik (2018:390), the Kano model classified the quality attributes which influence consumer satisfaction into the categories explained below:

- **Must-be or basic attributes:** The must-be or basic quality attributes are a decisive factor, and if they are not present or fulfilled, the consumer will be dissatisfied. These attributes are considered as the basic expectations that the consumer has from the service. They are taken for granted when present, but result in dissatisfaction if they are not present. For example, a user-friendly environment is an attribute that consumers take for granted and its presence does not determine satisfaction, while its absence causes great dissatisfaction.

- **One-dimensional attributes:** With regard to these attributes, there is a feeling of satisfaction when they are met, and dissatisfaction if they are not met. Consumer satisfaction is proportional to the level of fulfilment: the higher the level of service performance on these attributes, the higher the consumer's satisfaction and vice versa. These attributes are usually demanded by the consumer. For example, reliability and waiting time are examples of one-dimensional attributes. When employees' deliver the service in the promised time, consumer satisfaction occurs, and when they fail, dissatisfaction occurs.
- **Attractive attributes:** These attractive service attributes will lead to satisfaction if present, although they do not cause dissatisfaction when they are not met. The attributes are not expected by the consumer but cause delight when they are present. Flexibility of time and hours are examples of attractive attributes.

The **horizontal axis** in Kano's model illustrated in Figure 2.3 below indicates the degree to which an aspect fulfils the consumer's requirements, and the **vertical axis** indicates the degree to which the consumer is satisfied or dissatisfied with the product or service (Kano *et al.*, 1984:39).

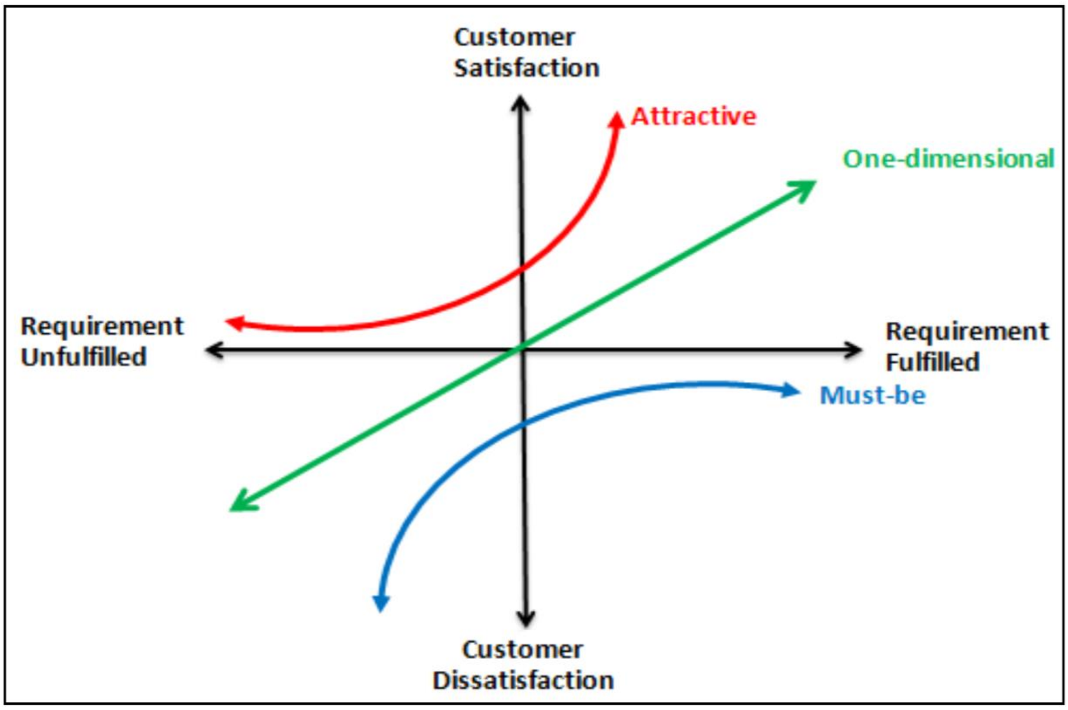

Figure 2.3: Kano model

Source: Kano *et al.* (1984:39)

Kano's model poses advantages in that the model does not require the consumer to have had experience with the attributes that are being classified, and it can determine certain product/service attributes that help to achieve the highest level of consumer satisfaction (Basfirinci & Mitra, 2015:240; Mkpojiogu & Hashim, 2016:3). The weakness of the model is that it does not take the importance of the measured attributes into account (Mutsonziwa & Serumaga-Zake, 2015:167). The Brady and Cronin Hierarchical model is explained in the next section.

2.4.3 The Brady and Cronin Hierarchical model

Brady and Cronin (2001) developed a hierarchical model to measure service quality (Ghotbabadi *et al*., 2015:277). Brady and Cronin (2001) proposed that service quality should be based on a hierarchical multidimensional model, and in this model service quality is the overall dimension, consisting of three primary dimensions, namely, interaction quality, physical environment quality and outcome quality. Each primary dimension consists of its sub-dimensions. Channoi, Clemes and Dean (2018:108) and Singh (2016:476) explained the primary dimensions as follows:

- The first dimension, **interaction quality** refers to the quality of the interaction between service provider and consumer during service delivery. Wang, Kim, Ko and Liu, (2016:3828) highlighted the importance of personal interaction during service delivery, and identified this dimension as the one that has the most significant effect on service quality perceptions. Attitude, behaviour and expertise are sub-dimensions of interaction quality. Attitude refers to the employee's willingness to help consumers; behaviour relates to the employee's taking actions to address the consumer's needs and expertise refers to the employee's knowledge or skills about the service.
- The second dimension is **physical environment quality**. This refers to the physical aspects of the service production process. Channoi *et al.* (2018:110) consider this dimension as the extent to which the tangible features of the service-place play a formative role in the consumer's perceptions of overall service quality. Brady and Cronin (2001) pointed out that environmental quality has an important influence on the consumer's evaluation of service quality. The sub-dimensions of physical environment quality are ambient condition, design and social factors. Ambient conditions involve non-visual aspects such as temperature, scent and

lights; design refers to the layout of the environment, and social factors refer to the number and type of the people in the service setting, as well as their behaviour.

- The third dimension, **outcome quality,** was defined as “what the consumer is left with when the production process is finished”. It is the determinant of the overall service quality assessed by consumers (Hossain, Dwivedi & Naseem, 2015:539). The dimension focuses on the amount of time the consumer has waited to receive the service and the consumer’s feelings towards the service. It determines whether the consumer is satisfied with the outcome of the service quality provided by the organisation. Its sub-dimensions are waiting time, tangibles and valence. Waiting time refers to the amount of time it takes for the employee to provide a service; tangibles relates to any tangible evidence which consumers use as a proxy for assessing the outcome quality. Valence reflects whether consumers believe that the service outcome is good or bad, regardless of their evaluation of any other aspect of the experience. The hierarchical model of Brady and Cronin (2001) is depicted in Figure 2.4.

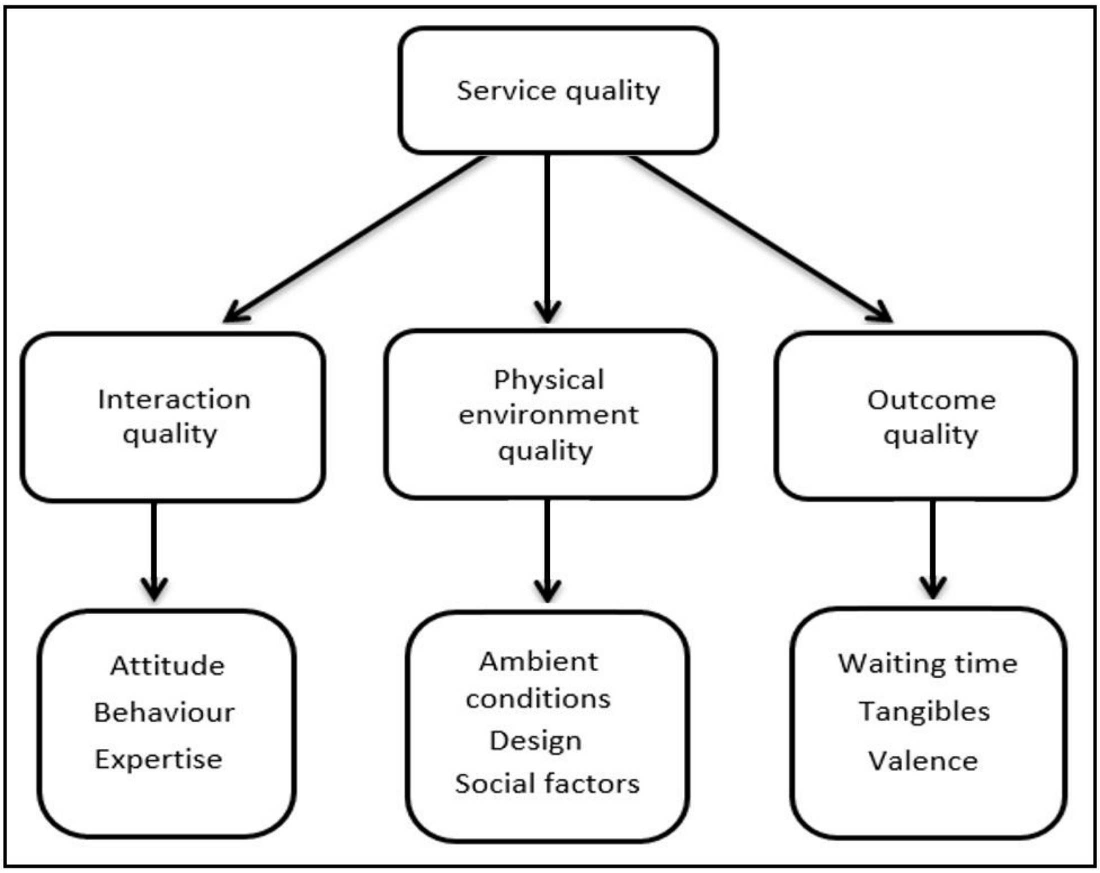

Figure 2.4: The Brady and Cronin Hierarchical model

Source: Brady and Cronin (2001:37)

According to Wang *et al* (2016:3827), consumers form their perceptions of service quality based on their evaluations of the primary dimensions that are composed of multiple sub-dimensions. Consumers aggregate their evaluations of the sub-dimensions to form their perceptions of an organisation's performance on each of the three primary dimensions, and those perceptions then lead to the overall perception of service quality (Baker, 2014:69).

Brady and Cronin (2001) proposed that the sub-dimensions influence quality dimensions, in other words, the sub-dimensions directly contribute to the perceptions related to the service quality dimensions. However, their model is operationalised in a different way; dimensions are variables that influence sub-dimensions (Martinez & Martinez, 2010:33). Polyakova and Mirza (2015:70) pointed out that Brady and Cronin have not addressed this contradiction and it raises concerns about interpreting the conceptualisation of the model. The SERVQUAL model is explained in the next section.

2.4.4 The SERVQUAL model

Parasuraman *et al.* (1988:12) developed the SERVQUAL instrument for measuring the service quality in a service organisation. The SERVQUAL instrument comprises of 22 statements used to assess service quality through the service dimensions, namely, tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Each statement is used twice to measure both consumer perceptions and expectations (Pabedinskaite & Akstinaite, 2014:404). Teshnizi, Aghamolaei, Kahnouji, Teshnizi and Ghani (2018:83) pointed out that the service quality gap (*Q*) is calculated by the perception score (P) subtracting the expectations (*E*) score.

$$Q = P - E$$

When conducting a measurement of the service quality, it is important to clearly differentiate between the quality expected by the consumer in the case of a given service, and the actual quality provided during a service process and its consumer perceptions (Pabedinskaite & Akstinaite, 2014:404). Jones and Shandiz (2015:51) have identified the following ways the model can be used:

- Service organisations may identify average gaps for each service attribute by identifying the differences between consumers' perceptions and expectations.

- The five SERVQUAL dimensions may be used to assess the service organisations' service quality.
- Service organisations may monitor consumers' perceptions and expectations using the individual service attributes of the SERVQUAL dimensions.
- Service organisations may compare the service quality ratings against those provided by competing organisations.
- The service organisations' service performance measurements may be used to identify and examine differences in consumer segments.
- The SERVQUAL instrument may be used to measure the internal service quality offered by the service organisation's departments or divisions.

Abdelkrim and Salim (2015:128) argued that the SERVQUAL model poses disadvantages due to the length of its questionnaire that consists of 44 statements, and the fact that measuring perceptions and expectations simultaneously can cause boredom and confusion. Respondents who are asked to rate a service before and after consumption would not be interested in participating in the study because the process is time-consuming (Msosa, 2015:31).

The SERVQUAL model is based on the Gaps model of service quality which assists in identifying the gaps between the consumers' expectations of service and their perceptions of the actual service delivered (Diedericks *et al*., 2015:163). The model is explained in detail in the next section.

2.4.5 The GAP model

Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) developed a conceptual model of service quality where they identified the gaps that could impact the consumer's evaluation of service quality. The Gap model can be adapted to any service organisation, and information on service gaps can assist managers to understand where performance improvement can be targeted (Huang, Tseng & Hsu, 2016:87). The focus of the service quality GAP model is the service gap between the expectations and the actual level of performance, where employees are unable to execute service quality at the defined levels in respect of set service standards (Ismail & Yunan, 2016:271).

The Gap model highlights five gaps in the delivery of service which influence a consumer's judgment about the quality of service received. For the service industry to meet the consumers' demands, it is essential to break through the quality gaps as illustrated in the Gap model (Unuvar & Kaya, 2016:355). Figure 2.5 shows the conceptual model of service quality.

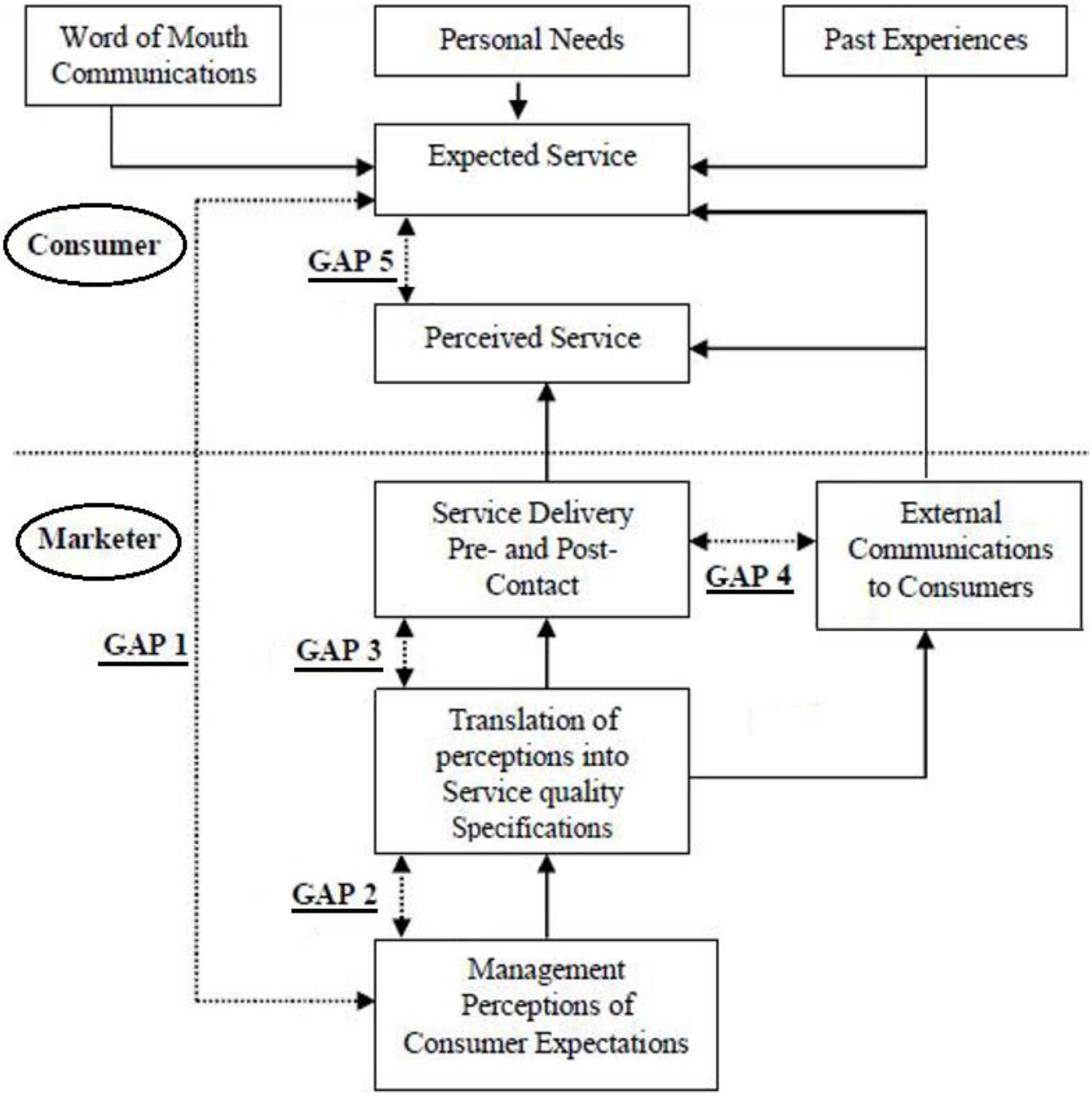

Figure 2.5: The Gap model of service quality

Source: Parasuraman *et al.* (1985:44)

Figure 2.5 illustrates how service quality is derived through the use of this model (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985:44). The model consists of two parts, the upper part (Gap 5) represents a consumer-oriented category, and the lower part (Gap 1-4) shows phenomena related to the service provider (Grönroos, 2015:130). Gaps 1-4 contribute to Gap 5. The service quality gaps as depicted on Figure 2.5 are discussed next.

2.4.5.1 Gap 1: The knowledge gap

This first gap refers to the difference between management's perceptions of consumer expectations and consumer expectations. There are two perspectives in this gap, the one being the consumer's perspective and the other the management's perspective of service quality. The gap exists between what the organisation believes consumers expect from their service and what consumers really expect (Paul *et al.*, 2016:609). Service quality from the management perspective means the degree to which the service features conform to the organisations specifications and requirements, whereas from the consumers' perspective, service quality means how well the service meets or exceeds expectations (Mackay, Mostert & Petzer, 2015:46; Lone & Rehman, 2017:3). According to Boshoff (2014:56), the knowledge gap is the most basic but also the most crucial step in satisfying consumers' needs, desires and expectations. The organisation can close this gap by developing a better understanding of consumer expectations and perceptions (Moreno, 2015:37).

2.4.5.2 Gap 2: The standards gap

Gap 2 is the gap between management's perceptions of consumer expectations and service quality specifications. This is the distinction between management's understanding of consumer expectations and the development of service standards. It is important to assess consumer expectations to turn them into the provision of real service standards. This gap is influenced by the factors that include: insufficient standardisation of tasks, and inadequate management involvement in a problem of service quality (Huang *et al.*, 2016:88). For example, management may understand the consumer perceptions, however, they may fail to deliver prompt service consistently because of unrealistic service standards. This gap can be closed by the organisation setting the appropriate service standards and measuring service performance (Msosa, 2015:29).

2.4.5.3 Gap 3: The delivery gap

Gap 3 is the gap between the service quality specification and the actual service delivery by the front-line employees. This gap exists between the service standards and the service actually provided (Paul *et al.*, 2016:609). According to Grönroos (2015:132), the service standard may not be met even when guidelines exist for service performance, and this gap could result from difficulty in adhering to the set standards because of employee performance, lack of teamwork, poor supervisory control system and shortages of resources. The gap can be closed by delivering the service that will exceed the standards by providing the employees with proper training and empowering them to act in the best interest of the consumer and the organisation, and ensuring that there are enough resources (Boshoff, 2014:57).

2.4.5.4 Gap 4: The communication gap

Gap 4 is the gap between the actual service delivery and communication about the service to consumers. According to Huang *et al.* (2016:88), this gap arises when the organisation fails to perform the over-promised service to the consumers. If expectations play an important role in consumer perceptions of service quality, the organisation must be certain not to promise more in communications than it can deliver in reality (Unuvar & Kaya, 2016:356). For example, organisations must have service charters that they will be able to maintain, rather than over-promising what they may not be able to deliver on a continuous basis.

2.4.5.5 Gap 5: The service gap

Gap 5 is the difference between the consumer's perceptions and expectations of service. The consumers judge service quality depending on how they perceive the actual service and what they expected (Msosa, 2015:30). The service gap is the combination of all four gaps: the knowledge, the standards, the service delivery and the communications gap, and if these preceding four gaps can be closed, the service gap will not exist (Kumar & Mishra, 2015:31). The organisation can close this gap by matching the consumer expectations with their perceptions of the actual service delivered (Grönroos, 2015:134).

2.4.6 The SERVPERF model

Cronin and Taylor (1992) developed a performance-based measure, the SERVPERF model, and it has been the major alternative to the SERVQUAL model with respect to measuring service quality. The SERVPERF model uses the same 22 items as the SERVQUAL scale to measure only perceptions, and it excludes any consideration of expectations (Cronin & Taylor, 1992:58). According to Abidin (2015:237), the SERVPERF model only measures the actual perception-based items, rather than the expectations-based items related to service quality. In simple terms, the model does not assess the gap scores between perceptions and expectations, as the expectation does not exist in the SERVPERF. Hamid and Yip (2019:21) add that the SERVPERF instrument measures service quality from only the perception of the service experience, and the model collects the opinions on service quality based on the perceptions of the consumers after experiencing the service.

The SERVPERF model differs from the SERVQUAL model in that the SERVPERF measures actual performance based on consumer satisfaction, while the SERVQUAL measures performance based on the gap between expectations and perceptions (Jain & Aggarwal, 2015:127). Ushantha *et al.* (2014:73) added that that the SERVPERF only evaluates consumer perceptions of service delivered, while the SERVQUAL evaluates both consumer expectations and perceptions related to the service offered.

Researchers emphasise that measuring the perceptions of service provided is enough, and is more useful than comparing the expectations and perceptions of consumers on the service provided because expectations are not static and can easily change (Ghotbabadi *et al.,* 2015:280). Furthermore, the SERVPERF scale is simpler to use and less time-consuming than the SERVQUAL scale (Inglandi, 2016:170). However, Alrawashdeh and Alrawashdeh (2014:199) stated that the performance-only measure (SERVPERF) explains more variance in an overall measure of service quality than the SERVQUAL instrument.

For the purpose of this study, the SERVPERF model was used to measure service quality based on the perceptions of consumers at the LSCs after experiencing the service.

The next sub-section provides a summary of numerous studies that have used the SERVPERF instrument to measure service quality.

2.4.6.1 Application of the SERVPERF in various studies

The SERVPERF model has been used to measure service quality and has proven to be a valid and flexible instrument to measure the quality of service in various service industries (Vrana, Dimitriadis & Kavavasilis, 2015:83; Ghotbabadi *et al*, 2015:276).

Table 2.1 on the following page presents the studies that have used the SERVPERF to measure service quality in various industries.

Table 2.1: Studies that have used the SERVPERF

Authors	Industry	Study
Alrawashdeh and Alrawashdeh (2014)	Hotel industry	The study used SERVPERF to measure the degree of hotels' service quality performance from the consumers' perspective.
Diedericks *et al.* (2015)	Higher education	The aim was to measure students' perceptions of service quality at a South African traditional University of Technology.
Leong, Hew, Lee and Ooi (2015)	Airline industry	The study examined the impacts of the SERVPERF dimensions on customer satisfaction towards loyalty in the airline industry.
Shabi, Oyedapo and Isaniyi (2016)	Library sector	The study used SERVPERF to determine the user's satisfaction at the national library, Osogbo, Nigeria.
Mackay and Major (2017)	Banking industry	The aim of the study was to investigate customer's actual perceptions of their retail bank's service quality.
Akdere *et al.* (2018)	Health sector	The study examined patient perceptions of service quality in Turkish hospitals.
Haque and Sultan (2019)	Insurance industry	The study made use of SERVPERF to assess the quality of service in the insurance sector of Saudi Arabia.

Source: Author's own compilation

The SERVPERF instrument was able to assist in realising the research objectives of each study mentioned in Table 2.1. Based on the evidence of the application of the SERVPERF in the studies as listed in Table 2.1, it is clear that SERVPERF still remains a widely-used and popular instrument for measuring service quality (Adedamola *et al.*, 2016:318; Akdere *et al.*, 2018:3, Hamid & Yip, 2019:21). It can be concluded that the SERVPERF is an appropriate measure of service quality in service organisations, therefore it can be used to determine consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. The summary of this chapter is provided in the next section.

2.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter focused on a literature review of service quality within service organisations. The concepts service and service quality were defined and explained in detail, starting with the characteristics of service, the importance of service quality, benefits of service quality, and its dimensions. In addition, the definitions of consumer expectations, perceptions, and consumer satisfaction were also discussed. Moreover, the different service quality models were discussed with a specific emphasis on the SERVPERF measurement instrument which was used in the current study to measure service quality. Moreover, a summary was provided of previous studies that serve as evidence of the application of the SERVPERF instrument as a commonly used measurement tool to measure service quality to justify the utilisation of this measurement tool in the current study.

The next chapter discusses consumer perceptions as an important component of consumer behaviour in evaluating service quality, as introduced in Section 2.3.3.

CHAPTER 3:
CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Every day consumers perform transactions to purchase goods and services. As such, consumers play a vital role in any business, as they create a demand for goods and services, which then leads to business growth and profitability (Szmigin & Piacentini, 2015:3). Oliver (2016:5) argued that it is crucial for the service industry to determine the perceptions that drive consumer behaviour, so that these key perceptions can be prioritised to ensure success in the marketplace. Service providers should understand how consumers think, feel and act, and they should offer clear value to each target consumer (Kotler & Keller, 2016:179).

This chapter commences with a detailed discussion of consumer behaviour, since perception is an element of consumer behaviour (Simon & Manohar, 2015:39). The consumer behaviour model is then presented. In addition, both the individual and external factors that influence consumer behaviour are explained, with the emphasis on consumer perceptions. The concept of perception is defined and then discussed in detail. The stages that consumers go through during the perceptual process are explained. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the consumer decision-making process.

3.2 CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Consumer behaviour is a term that has been defined by many authors (Cohen *et al.*, 2014:872). Blythe (2014:62) defined consumer behaviour as the activities that consumers undertake when obtaining, consuming and disposing of products and services. It involves certain decisions, activities, ideas or experiences that satisfy consumer needs and wants (Cohen *et al.*, 2014:873). Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015:30) described consumer behaviour as the activity that occurs when consumers make a decision of searching, purchasing and consuming a product or service. Kotler and Keller (2016:179) also defined consumer behaviour as the study of how individuals, groups, or organisations select, buy, use and dispose of products, services, experiences or ideas to satisfy needs and wants.

For the purpose of this study, consumer behaviour is defined as the study of how LSCs consumers behave in situations involving service, ideas or experiences to satisfy their needs and wants (Ling *et al.,* 2015:7). These situations involve the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase phases. It includes all the thoughts, feelings and actions that occur before, during and after the consumer purchases a service, as well as answers, such as what, why, how, when and where a consumer makes a purchase (Khaniwale, 2015:278).

Consumer behaviour is the most researched topic in the field of marketing and business organisations (Sargunam & Bruce, 2015:92). Most successful business organisations regularly engage in efforts to understand consumer behaviour (Rath & Mishra, 2017:54185). By understanding the consumer and their respective behaviour, organisations will produce the information about how consumers think, feel and choose the products or services that satisfy their needs and wants (Nguyen & Gizaw, 2014:1). Armstrong and Kotler (2015:161) state that organisations do research about consumer purchasing decisions to answer questions about what the consumers purchase, where they purchase, how and how much they purchase, when they purchase, as well as why they purchase. However, learning about why consumer purchase is not easy because the answer is kept deep within the consumer's mind (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:161).

Consumers themselves do not understand exactly what influences their purchases (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:160). According to Singh (2017:64), consumer behaviour is triggered by wants and needs. However, each consumer is subject to different influences, such as individual factors and external factors, all of which influence the decision to purchase the products and services that satisfy their needs.

Figure 3.1 on the next page illustrates the model of consumer behaviour, and provides a clear view of the factors that can influence the way consumers react or behave during the decision-making process.

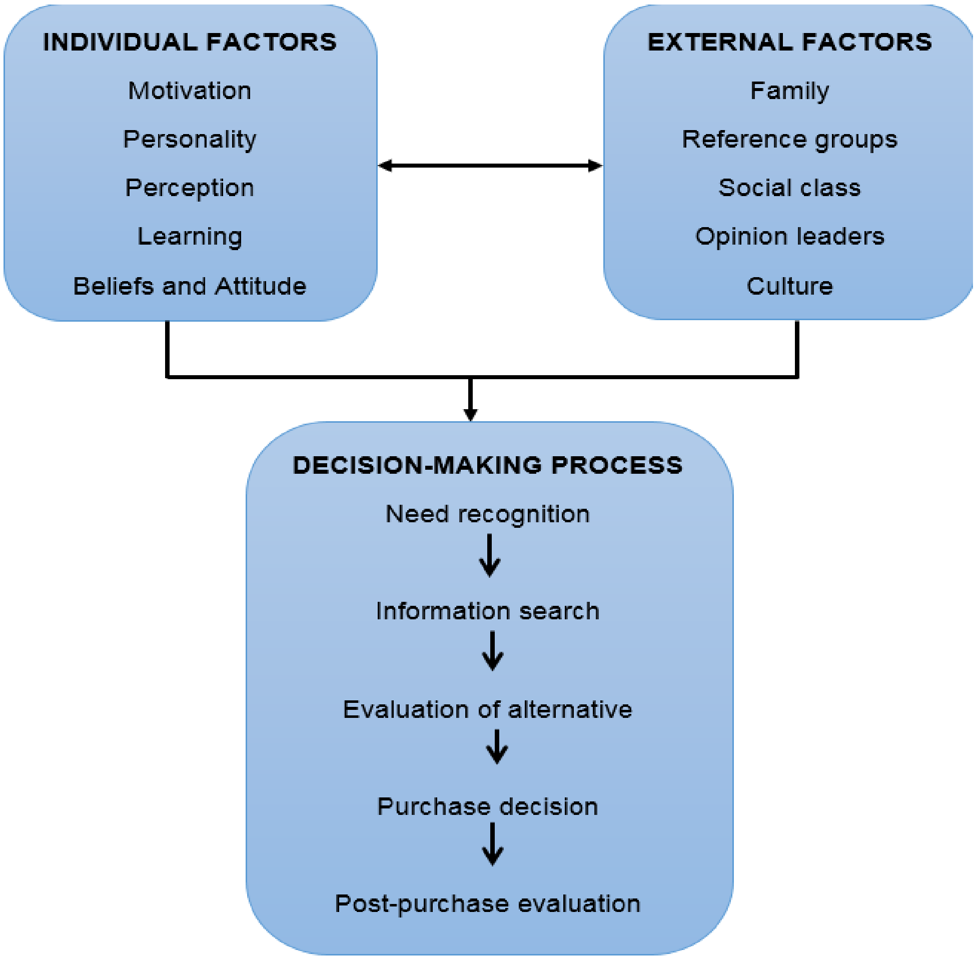

Figure 3.1: The consumer behaviour model

Source: Kotler and Keller (2016:187).

Consumers sometimes have to take critical decisions when it comes to satisfying their needs and wants. These include decisions regarding the goods or services that will satisfy their needs and where they purchase them (Van Belkum, 2016:23). It is important for the organisation to understand the extent of the influence has on the consumer purchasing decision. From the above model of consumer behaviour (Figure 3.1), it is clear that various influences result in consumer decisions to purchase goods or services.

This study focused on the factors that could influence the LSC consumer's behaviour. The next section outlines the individual factors and external factors that influence the consumer behaviour and process as depicted in Figure 3.1.

3.3 FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

According to Kotler and Armstrong (2014:159), consumer behaviour is influenced by individual and external factors. Marketers and service providers are unable to control these factors but they have to take them into account (Tinonetsana, 2017:16). A discussion of both individual and external factors as depicted in Figure 3.1 follows.

3.3.1 Individual factors

Individual factors refer to the internal or the psychological processes that happen in the consumer's mind, and they play an important role in influencing consumer decision-making (Ramaswamy & Namakumari, 2018:235). Individual factors include the consumer's motivation, personality, perception, learning, belief and attitude, as discussed below.

3.3.1.1 Motivation

Motivation is a need or want that becomes pressing enough to lead a consumer to behave and seek satisfaction (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014:171). motivations are the basis of all human behaviour and occur when an individual wants to satisfy a need, and it implies taking action (Seabra *et al*., 2016:5). All behaviour begins with needs and wants and they influence consumer decision-making (Schiffman & Wisenblit , 2015:84).

Ling *et al.* (2015:246) described 'needs' as the basic forces that motivate an individual to do something, and 'wants' are described as optional desires to satisfy basic needs. In other words, wants are needs that are learned during an individual's lifetime. The organisation need to know what motivated their consumer to make a decision to purchase. For example, a consumer may have a need to acquire a driver's licence, and some consumers may want and be motivated to do it at their desired LSC.

3.3.1.2 Personality

Lautiainen (2015:8) described personality as the unique psychological characteristics of a consumer that both determine and reflect how he or she behaves or responds to the environment. It is certain persistent qualities in human behaviour that lead to consistent responses to the world of stimuli surrounding the consumer (Cohen *et al.*, 2014:882). Every consumer has his/her own characteristic personality traits that reflect in his/her buying behaviour (Orji, Sabo, Abubakar & Usman, 2017:8). Selfconfidence, sociability, adaptability, defensiveness and aggressiveness are used for describing the personality of an individual (Udo-Imeh, 2015:67).

Personality remains one of the concepts in consumer behaviour likely to have an influence on the decision-making processes, purchase behaviour, perception, product and service choice (Sandu, 2014:368). What consumers purchase, when and how they purchase are influenced by their personality types. For example, every consumer has his or her own way of behaving or responding to the environment. Consumers may choose to acquire licensing services and stay loyal to the particular LSC, based on their personal preferences.

3.3.1.3 Learning

Learning occurs through action; when individuals act, they learn (Rani, 2014:59). Learning is the process used by individuals to acquire knowledge about purchasing and consumption, and it also involves the experience they have acquired that they apply to future-related behaviour (Ling *et al.*, 2015:365). Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015:149) add that learning is about applying your knowledge and experience to present circumstances. Learning changes the behaviour of an individual as he or she acquires information and experience.

For the purpose of this study, consumers learn about the various LSCs around them that offer the required services and the requirements needed in order to acquire the service. This new information acquired about LSCs may influence their future consumer behaviour.

3.3.1.4 Beliefs and attitudes

Through doing and learning, individuals acquire beliefs and attitudes (Kotler & Armstrong, 2014:173). Beliefs and attitudes play an essential role in influencing the consumers' decision-making. A belief is a conviction that an individual has about something. Through the experience consumers have acquired, and their learning and external influences, they develop a belief that influences their behaviour (Rani, 2014:60). Beliefs and attitudes influence everyone's lives and affect the ways that individual behave towards other people, objects, events and situations (Iacobucci, 2015:26).

Keegan and Green (2015:127) described attitude as a feeling, belief and way of behaving that an individual develops about objects, events, people and issues over a lifetime through learning and interacting with people and the environment. Attitudes are formed based on the belief a consumer holds, which after performing certain action and depending on the outcome of that behaviour being either positive or negative, will ultimately create an attitude in the consumer (Shunmugam, 2015:16). Attitude determines how consumers react towards a situation, decisions or people. A positive or negative attitude about the environment can influence consumer decision-making (Sargunam & Bruce, 2015:94). For example, a consumer who has negative experience regarding the quality of service offered by a particular LSC is more likely to avoid visiting that LSC in the future.

3.3.1.5 Perception

A consumer's perception plays an important role during the consumer decision-making process (Simon & Manohar, 2015:40). Dreyer *et al* (2016:5) state that perception is an individual or internal factor that can influence consumer's decisions to purchase organisational products and services.

Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015:114) pointed out that consumer's actions and reactions are based on their perceptions and not on their reality, therefore it is important that the organisation understands the notion of perception because they make decisions and take actions based on what they perceive to be the reality. Past experience either positive or negative may influence the consumer's perception and purchasing decision. Consumers have a perception related to what they are expecting, and this is usually based on familiarity, previous experience, values and motivations (Cohen *et al.*, 2014:885). For example, consumers' perceptions about the service quality of a particular service tend to vary amongst consumers, as their expectations may differ (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015:114). Two consumers may receive the same service at the same LSC but their perceptions and interpretation will differ.

Consumer perception is the focal point of this chapter and will be discussed in more detail in Section 3.4. The next section discusses the external factors influencing consumer behaviour.

3.3.2 External factors

External factors are described as aspects that influence a consumer through being involved with other consumers on a daily basis (Strydom, 2014:74). These external factors influencing consumer behaviour include family, social class, reference groups and opinion leaders.

3.3.2.1 Family

Family members have a strong influence on consumers' decision-making (Durmaz, 2014:37; Sargunam & Bruce, 2015:92). A family whose members have lived in close contact with one another for years gradually develop fixed behaviour and consumption patterns (Blythe, 2014:106). According to Strydom (2014:76), children learn consumer behaviour in terms of skills, knowledge and attitude from their parents, and therefore, this has an influence on their decision-making. It is unlikely for adults to purchase a product or service they were not exposed to when they were children. Strydom (2014:83) further highlighted that the family members can play any of the following roles in the consumer's decision-making namely:

- The **initiator** is the individual within the family who makes the first suggestion regarding the service to be purchased.
- The **influencer** is the individual within the family who influences the consumer's final decision through suggestions and providing information for the evaluation of alternatives.
- The **decision-maker** is the family member who decides between choices of alternatives and makes the final decision whether or not to purchase the service.
- The **purchaser** is the individual who buys the service that the decision-maker has chosen.
- The **user** is the individual within the family who will make use of the purchased service.

Research has shown that consumers are more influenced by the opinions of family members than by marketing messages (Singh, 2017:70). For example, if the consumer 's family member (parents) have preferred to acquire a service at Waltloo LSC for decades, the young consumer (children) may be influenced to acquire their services at the same LSC through observation of their parents who function as role models.

3.3.2.2 Social class

Social class refers to groups of people who have the same social standing in society and who show behaviour patterns based on similarities in income, education and occupation (Strydom, 2014:74). Research indicates that social class plays a role in influencing the consumer during the decision-making process (Le Roux, Van der Merwe, Wilders & Wissing, 2017:13). Social influence is about the changing of feelings, attitude, thoughts and behaviour, which are intentionally or unintentionally influenced by the other person (Rahim *et al.*, 2016:248).

According to Le Roux *et al.* (2017:13), these groups of people place consumers under social pressure in response to their need to conform, and they experience the desire to improve their self-esteem by consuming services. Individuals associate themselves with different groups in their daily lives that influence their decision making. For example, consumers belonging to an upper social class are less likely to visit a LSC that everyone who is using public transport go to because the queue might be very long. However, consumers belonging to a lower social class are more likely to visit a LSC that is simple to reach with public transport.

3.3.2.3 Reference groups

According to Lautiainen (2015:11), reference groups have the potential to influence a consumer's behaviour and attitude. Blythe (2014:103) defined reference groups as people whose opinions are valued and to whom a person looks for guidance in their purchasing behaviour. When consumers are uncertain about how to behave, they are more likely to seek information from others to help form their choices or make a decision (Rahim *et al.*, 2016:248).

Reference groups include relatives, friends, co-workers, neighbours and members of an organisation or other people that a consumer associates with (Lautiainen, 2015:6) For example, reference group may influence a consumer to acquire a licensing service at their preferred LSC when faced with making a choice about an LSC.

3.3.2.4 Opinion leaders

An opinion leader is a member of a group who provides information about specific topics to other group members seeking that information (Ramaswamy & Namakumari, 2018:235). Opinion leaders have a strong influence on decision-making, as other group members consider them to be well informed. Through their expertise, knowledge and skills, opinion leaders become sources of information and they are able to guide and lead those who seek information (Singh, 2017:74). For example, an opinion leader may be a licensing officer and group members may ask advice from him/her in choosing the LSC that is offering the required services based on their knowledge or past experience.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that individual and external factors can influence how consumers think and behave, thus influencing their decision-making. Consumer perception is discussed in the next section.

3.4 CONSUMER PERCEPTION

Various authors have formulated definitions for the term ‘consumer perception’, as briefly highlighted in Chapter 2. Ling *et al.* (2015:326) defined consumer perception as the process by which consumers select, organise and interpret stimuli to the five human senses of sight, sound, smell, touch and taste to create a meaningful and logical picture of the world around them. Ling *et al.* (2015:326) further argued that consumers’ perception of the world around them depends on physical stimuli and their past experiences. Similarly, Nel and De Beer (2014:339) described consumer perception as the process of receiving, organising and assigning meaning to information or stimuli detected by the five senses. Consumer perception can thus be viewed as the way in which consumers interpret or give meaning to what is happening around them.

Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015:114) defined consumer perception as the process by which consumers select, organise and interpret stimuli or information into a meaningful and coherent picture. Two consumers may be exposed to the same situations, but each consumer recognises, selects, organises and interprets the situation differently due to their different needs (Blythe, 2014:101). However, perception is selective, meaning consumers see what they want to see (Smith & Zook, 2016:122). Schiffman and Wisenblit (2015:114) add that consumer perceptions about the service quality of a particular service tend to vary amongst consumers as their expectations may differ. Among the many definitions of perceptions that have been suggested, Kotler and Keller (2016:189) described perception as the process by which consumers select, organise and interpret information inputs to create a meaningful picture of the world. Perception allows individuals to absorb the information they are exposed to through each of the five senses and allows them to interpret the information in a way that they understand.

For the purpose of this study, consumer perception can be described as how consumers personally experience the quality of the service that is provided, whether they view it as favourable or unfavourable (Machado, 2014:14). This definition is appropriate for the study, as the purpose is to determine the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs of the COT municipality.

Perception is personal in nature, while one consumer may perceive the service offered at the LSCs as favourable, another consumer may perceive the service as being unfavourable. Therefore, LSCs should take into account the perceptions and needs of consumers in providing quality service. This view is supported by Renko and Druzijanic (2014:836) in pointing out that the service organisations must understand the concept of service quality from the consumer's point of view, and not from the organisation's point of view. Consumer perceptions related to service quality are determined by their experiences with the service, as well as the expectations they bring to the service situation, and their perception of the quality of the service they have received (Du Preez *et al.*, 2018:38).

The formation of perception begins with the observation that through the process of utilising the five senses, the consumer then selects, organises and interprets the information that is received into a meaningful picture (Wulandari & Subagio, 2015:473). Wulandari and Subagio, (2015:473) further added that these observations are influenced by the past experiences and attitudes of consumers.

The process of the formation of perception is made up of various stages, as discussed in the next section.

3.5 THE PERCEPTUAL PROCESS

Consumers may have different perceptions of the same situation because of the perceptual processes they undergo. Paramasur and Roberts (2014:161) describe the perceptual process as a series of activities through which stimuli are perceived, transformed into information and stored.

The process commences when the consumer is exposed to an external search. The consumer goes through four stages, namely, exposure, attention, interpretation and recall during the perceptual process (Singh, 2017:88). Ultimately, these stages form our perception as is illustrated in Figure 3.2 below.

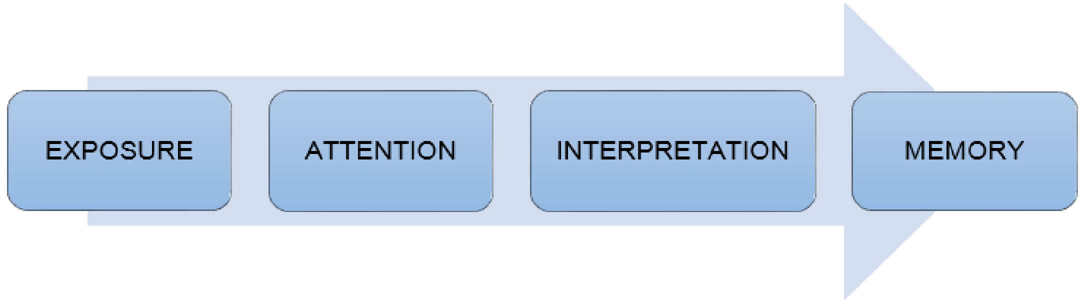

Figure 3.2: Perceptual process: Information processing

Source: Adapted from Ling *et al.* (2015:327)

Figure 3.2 shows that the process of consumer perception is made up of the following four stages:

- **Exposure:** exposure is the degree to which consumers notice a stimulus that is within the range of their five senses of sight, sound, smell, and touch and taste (Sephapo, 2016:93). It occurs when a consumer selectively chooses to be exposed to only certain stimuli. For example, a consumer can avoid unwelcome stimuli by ignoring the advertisement or browsing through the notice board. In the context of this study, when consumers visit municipal office to pay for services, they may be exposed to the information about LSCs that can render licensing services they need.
- **Attention:** attention occurs when consumers pay attention to one or more stimuli, while ignoring their other forms of stimuli around them that their senses might have picked up (Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matteson, 2014:96). Lautiainen (2015:11) adds that consumers prioritise messages that are related to their current need.

Consumers are exposed to numerous advertisements, but may focus on those that stimulate interest and are relevant to them. In this study, a consumer who has a need to acquire licensing services will pay more attention to the information about the LSCs that offer the required services.

- **Interpretation:** interpretation occurs when the stimuli are created into a meaningful picture (Ling *et al.*, 2015:342). Two consumers may be exposed to the same stimuli, but their interpretations can differ, as they may interpret the stimuli based on their previous experiences which differ (Smith & Zook, 2016:137). During this stage, the consumer can interpret the message incorrectly by distorting the meaning or by misunderstanding it. For example, consumers can misinterpret the information on media platforms regarding the services offered by different LSCs, for example, the consumer could visit the bulk LSCs assuming that they will be serviced not knowing that the LSC does not offer the service to the public.
- **Recall/memory:** recall or memory is the last stage of the perceptual process and refers to the consumer's ability to remember certain stimuli and to forget others that may be useful (Smith & Zook, 2016:137). For example, at the point of purchase, the consumer may have forgotten the advertisement and must therefore once again be reminded to purchase the product or service. In this study, consumers may forget about other requirements needed to acquire licensing service and use their experiences to recall or be reminded by the sources that supply the information.

Consumer perceptions are primarily the result of the information (stimuli) that consumers receive and how they interpret it. Organisations need to understand the nature of the perceptions their consumers have regarding their service. Understanding how consumers obtain and use information, and how their perceptions are formed to ultimately reach their goals is important for gaining insight into consumer behaviour (Rath & Mishra, 2017:54185). Smith and Zook (2016:137) pointed out that by understanding how consumers process the information through the stages of exposure, attention, interpretation and recall may help the organisations to create more platforms to deliver memorable messages and quality services. The consumer decision-making process is discussed in the next section.

3.6 CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING

Consumers engage in decision-making on a daily basis with regards to every aspect of their lives (Le Roux *et al.*, 2017:15). According to Nayeen and Casidy (2015:67), consumer decision-making is a complex process with a number of factors affecting every purchasing decision. Consumers learn about products and services from various sources, such as the media, family and friends and through their own experiences. The consumer decision-making process is described as the process followed by a consumer who has a specific need, and is evaluating alternative products or services with different brands, quality and prices, in order to find the best solution to meet that need (Cunningham & De Meyer-Heydenrych, 2018:29). Ivancevich *et al.* (2014:401) defined decision-making as the process of selecting an option from two or more alternative choices. Figure 3.3 depicts the five stages that consumers go through during the consumer decision-making process.

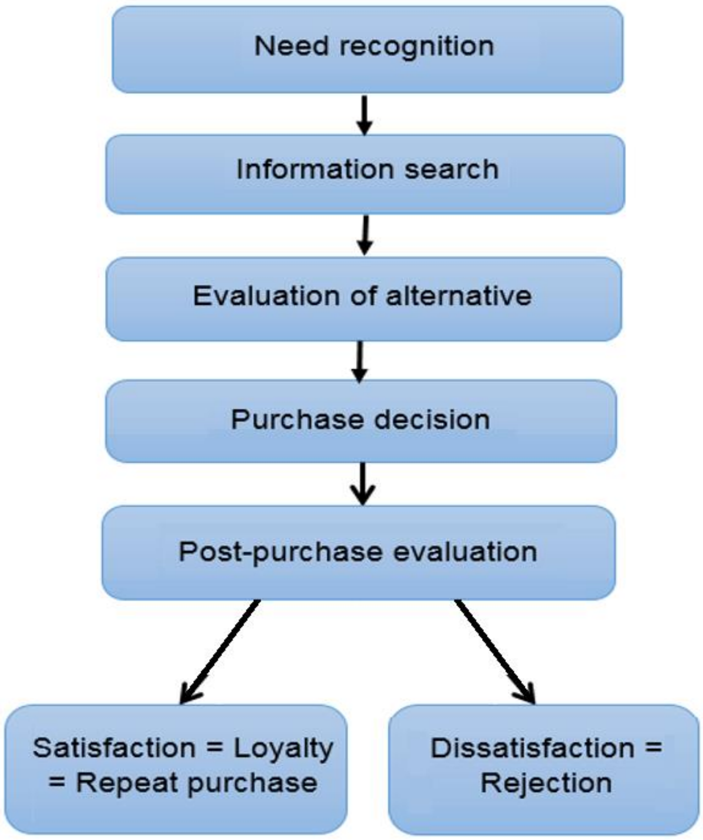

Figure 3.3: Consumer decision-making process

Source: Adapted from Smith and Zook (2016:114).

As seen in the figure 3.3, the consumer decision-making process begins with the consumer recognising that there is a need and then searching for information to try to solve or satisfy the need. The consumer then evaluates the alternative that will be most suitable to satisfy the need. Once the selection has been made, the decision to purchase takes place. Lastly, once the product or service has been purchased, the consumer then evaluates whether the product or service meets or exceeds their expectations (Starkey, 2017:30).

The stages of the decision-making process as depicted in Figure 3.3 are discussed as follows:

- **Stage 1: Need recognition**

  The first stage begins when the consumer recognises that there is a need for a product or service. Need is the most important factor which leads to the purchase of products and services (Strydom, 2014:73). A need can be triggered by an internal stimulus, such as hunger or thirst, and also by an external stimulus, such as an advertisement, mass media or word-of-mouth (Kotler and Keller, 2016:195). A consumer's reaction to the stimulus forces them to realise that there is an imbalance between their desired state and actual state (Singh, 2017:80). In the current study, when a consumer recognises that his/her driver's licence or motor vehicle licence has expired, a need to renew it arises, and this triggers the consumer buying decision.

- **Stage 2: Information search**

  After the consumer has recognised the need for a particular good or service, they seek information about the alternatives available to them to satisfy their need (Gbadamosi, 2019:123). The consumer will conduct an internal information search, based on their previous experience retrieved from their memory (Szmigin & Piacentini, 2015:92). According to Ramaswamy and Namakumari (2018:249), if the consumer does not have sufficient information from the internal search, they will conduct an external search. An external search refers to seeking information from outside the consumer's own experiences to obtain the necessary information needed for decision-making (Strydom, 2014:67). These external sources identified by Kotler and Armstrong (2014:176) include:

  - Personal Sources – Family members, friends, neighbours and co-workers.
  - Commercial sources – Advertisements and displays

- Public sources – Mass media, travel agencies, Web sites and social media
- Experiential sources – Handling, examining, using product and service.

Consumers are usually more exposed to information from commercial sources than from personal or public sources; however, personal sources influence them more when deciding which service to purchase (Fourie, 2015:56). The consumer may ask friends and family who have experience regarding his need during the information search. For example, LSC is the only place that offers licensing services, therefore after a need to renew a driver's licence has been recognised, the consumer will gather information about alternative licensing centres where the service can be acquired.

- **Stage 3: Evaluation of alternatives**

During the third stage, the consumer evaluates the alternatives that will be suitable for their identified need (Tinonetsana, 2017:21). The output of the information processing forms the consumer's attitudes and beliefs about a service, and this is what guides them concerning their selection of the alternatives to evaluate, eventually leading to the decision to purchase a service (Pather, 2014:19). According to Starkey (2017:32), consumers are efficient shoppers who select the retailer they perceive will provide the most satisfactory experience. In line with this study, after gathering relevant information, the consumer will evaluate the various LSCs available, and then select the most suitable one for licensing services. The consumer can choose between Waltloo, Akasia or Centurion's LSCs, considering the fact that they offer services directly to the public. The consumer will also choose an LSC that they perceive will provide quality service.

- **Stage 4: Purchase decision**

After searching and evaluating, the consumer makes a decision, selects the best choice from the alternatives and purchases the selected product or service (Gbadamosi, 2019:124). The selection is based on the outcome of the evaluation stage (Fourie, 2015:60). In this case, the consumer will visit the LSC selected in the preceding step to acquire licensing services.

- **Stage 5: Post-purchase evaluation**

  This is the final stage in the consumer decision-making process, as indicated in Figure 3.3. Post-purchase evaluation refers to a customer's analysis of the decision made. The consumer evaluates whether the service quality experience was useful or not, or alternatively whether the service experienced was satisfactory or dissatisfactory (Du Plessis *et al.*, 2016:92). The consumer's feeling towards the post-purchase is what determines the consumer perception of the service quality (Pather, 2014:20). The consumer need to decide whether they are satisfied with the experience from purchasing the desired goods or services. If the consumer is satisfied with the product or service, they may consider using the same product or service in the near future and a dissatisfied consumer may never use the product or service again.

Ramaswamy and Namakumari, (2018:249) pointed out that when a consumer evaluates their purchase decision, they may experience cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a conflicting thought or an uneasy feeling, belief and attitude that occurs after a consumer has made a decision or an performed an action, such as making a purchase (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2015:374). The consumers try to reassure themselves that they made the right choice in purchasing a product or service. For example, a consumer who has decided to acquire licensing services at a certain LSC then feels disappointed about the service rendered after further research has been done on the LSC. Ramaswamy and Namakumari (2018:253), however, argued that the dissonance is resolved if the consumer is satisfied with the service.

In line with the current study, the consumer will evaluate the quality service of the particular LSC based on their recent experience. The post-purchase evaluation stage in the consumer decision-making process is important for repeat purchases (Starkey, 2017:33). If the service at the LSC meets or exceeds the consumer's expectation, the consumer is more likely to visit the centre every time they want to acquire licensing services and word-of-mouth referrals will occur. However, if the service does not meet or exceed the consumer's expectation, the consumer is less likely to return to that LSC in future.

3.7 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a detailed discussion on consumer behaviour. The individual and external factors that influence consumer behaviour were discussed, with more focus on perceptions as one of the individual factors influencing the decision-making process. The discussion about consumer perceptions aimed to conceptualise the working definition relevant to the current study. This was followed by a discussion of the perceptual process. The chapter concluded with the discussion on the consumer decision-making process. The next chapter focuses on the research methodology relevant to the current study.

CHAPTER 4:
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Research plays a vital role in many service organisations. It provides information about what consumers want, need and care about (Bradley, 2013:7). Research is a function that links the consumer with the organisation through information. When conducting research, researchers collect data from the investigation, and then process and analyse it to isolate important information and findings (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:127). Brynard *et al.* (2014:3) describe research as a systematic and objective process of planning, identifying, collecting, analysing and reporting data that may be used to solve every specific situation facing an organisation or a researcher.

The research provides insight into consumer behaviour, motivation and satisfaction (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:131). This chapter starts with a discussion of the research process and the steps in the process that the study adhered to. The research problem of this study is discussed, followed by a discussion of the primary and secondary objectives of the study. The research methodology that was used in the study is presented, including an in-depth discussion of the research designs, data-collection approach, sample and sample frame, sampling techniques, data-collection methods and data analysis technique used. The chapter presents the limitations and then concludes with the ethical considerations that were followed in conducting this study.

4.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Cronin, Coughlan and Smith (2015:12) defined the research process as a process that provides the researcher with a systematic, planned procedure for conducting the research to ensure that all the parts of the research project are consistent with one another. The 'research onion' developed by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015) illustrates the way in which a researcher collects data. The research onion shows the issues underlying the choice of data-collection techniques and analysis procedures (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:122). The researcher needs to make a choice and explain why the choice is suitable for the research and if it assists in answering the research objectives. Clow and James (2014:10) point out that researchers should adhere to the research guidelines and follow a systematic step-by-step process when conducting research. The steps in the research process can overlap and therefore may differ between researchers (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019:4).

For this study, the steps in the research process, as developed by Wiid and Diggines (2013), were followed and form the entire discussion of this chapter. The steps in the research process are highlighted in Figure 4.1 below.

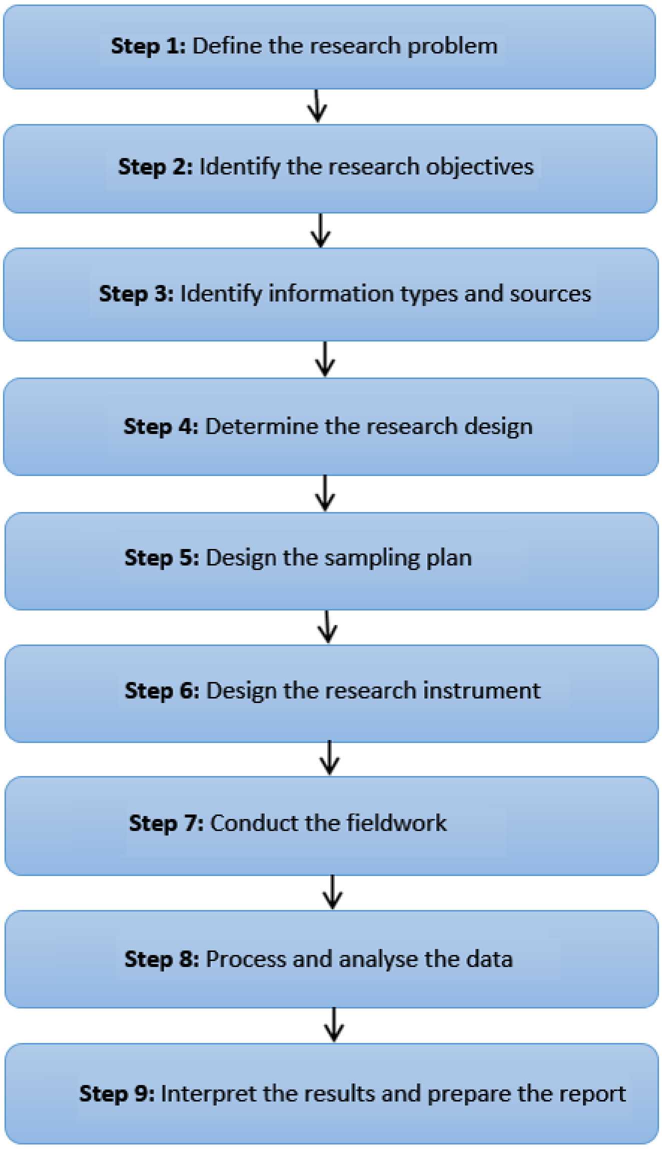

Figure 4.1: Steps in the research process

Source: Adapted from Wiid and Diggines (2013:31).

The research process comprises of nine steps, as indicated in Figure 4.1, and these steps are discussed in Sections 4.2.1 to 4.2.9. Each step is discussed in detail, focusing on the applicable theory, followed by an application to the study under investigation.

4.2.1 Step 1: Define the research problem

The first step of the research process is to define the research problem, which was introduced in Chapter 1 of this study. Armstrong and Kotler (2015:131) pointed out that defining the research problem is considered to be a critical step in the research process. The research problem is defined as the presentation of a specific problem to management, which represents the need for the research to be conducted (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:583). According to Aaker, Kumar, Leone and Day (2013:44), defining a research problem helps the researcher to identify the reasons why the problem occurs and offers possible solutions to the problem. The research problem of this study is that limited research has been conducted on service quality, specifically in the LSCs. Many previous studies have measured service quality in various sectors, as depicted in Table 1.2 in Chapter 1, however there has been limited research conducted on the service quality at the LSCs, and this creates a gap for this study.

4.2.2 Step 2: Identify the research objectives

Smith and Zook (2016:171) pointed out that research objectives are the goals that the researcher aims to achieve by carrying out the research project, and these objectives may serve as a road map for the research project. For this study, the primary objective, as stated in Chapter 1, was as follows:

- To determine consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality.

The secondary objectives developed to address the primary objective were:

- To determine consumer perceptions of all the tangible aspects at the LSCs.
- To assess the level of employees' reliability as perceived by LSCs' consumers.
- To examine consumer perceptions of employee's responsiveness at the LSCs.
- To measure the level of employees' assurance as perceived by consumers at the LSCs.
- To evaluate consumer perceptions regarding the employees' empathy at the LSCs.

- To establish the differences in the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs in terms of their gender, age and race.

After the research problem and objectives have been set, the researcher is needed to determine whether the problem would be solved by using primary or secondary data. Both primary data and secondary data are explained in the next step.

4.2.3 Step 3: Identify the information types and sources

During the research process, the researcher needs to identify the sources of data that are required to meet the objectives of the study. It is always important for the researcher to determine whether the research objectives can be achieved through the use of secondary data, and if the availability of secondary data is limited, the researcher may undertake the collection of primary data (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:96).

In order to achieve the objectives formulated for the current study, the researcher chose to use both secondary and primary data.

4.2.3.1 Secondary data

According to Kumar (2015:117), secondary data refers to the information that already exists. It is someone else’s interpretation of the primary data they have obtained. Brynard *et al.* (2014:38) added that secondary data refers to the information that already exists and that was collected by someone other than the current researcher. Similarly, O’Reilly and Kiyimba (2015:130) point out that secondary data is data that was previously collected for a purpose other than the research problem at hand.

Furthermore, secondary data may be obtained from internal and external sources (Blythe, 2014:164). Data from internal sources is information that is available within the organisation, for example, annual reports. Data from external sources is information from outside sources, for example, websites, academic textbooks, dissertations, previous articles from accredited journals and government publications (Blythe, 2014:164).

The use of secondary data has the advantage that it provides the necessary background information to the particular problem or research study at hand and is an effective tool that researchers can use in a variety of ways (Aaker *et al.*, 2013:93).

In order for the researcher to decide on whether or not to use secondary data for the research study, it is important to consider the advantages and disadvantages of secondary data.

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the advantages and disadvantages that are linked to the use of secondary data.

Table 4.1: Advantages and disadvantages of secondary data

Advantages	Disadvantages
Clarifies or better defines the research problem.	In some cases, the data may not be available.
Develops approach to the problem.	The data may not be relevant to solve the problem.
Provides imperative background information and builds credibility for the research report.	The data can be inaccurate.
Can alert researchers to potential problems and/or opportunities.	The data may be insufficient to solve the research problem.
Obtained easily.	The data can be outdated.
Faster and cost-effective method.	Measurement of units may differ from the current study's purpose.

Source: Adapted from Aaker *et al.* (2013:95).

This study used secondary data to form the literature review (Chapters 1 to 3). The secondary data was collected from textbooks, dissertations, academic articles from accredited journals, and publicly available sources in the media, such as newspapers, the internet and government publications, such as Government Gazettes, National Traffic Acts and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Primary data is explained next.

4.2.3.2 Primary data

Primary data refers to the data the researcher collects to address the research problem at hand and it involves raw data without interpretation by a second party (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2015:130). Primary data is usually collected when secondary data is not available or does not answer the research question (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:96).

There are two ways in which primary data can be collected: firstly, through observational techniques, and secondly, through communication techniques (Wiid &

Diggines, 2013:134). Wiid and Diggines (2013:134) describe both as follows: an observational technique is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of people, objects and occurrences without questioning or communicating with them. These include human or mechanical methods. Communication techniques are described as a method of primary data collection in which information is gathered by communicating with a representative sample of people, and these include surveys such as personal interviews, telephone, mail or online methods.

According to Bradley (2013:114), primary data also has the advantage that the data is generally more relevant to the research objectives when compared to secondary data. However, primary data can be more expensive and time-consuming to obtain.

After reviewing the existing literature relevant to the current study, primary data was collected from consumers at the selected LSCs within the COT municipality regarding their perception of the service quality of the LSCs. After identifying the information types and sources, the researcher can decide on the research design to be employed in the study.

4.2.4 Step 4: Determine the research design

The fourth step of the research process, as indicated in Figure 4.1, is to determine the research design. The research design is described as the procedures for collecting, analysing, interpreting, and reporting data in research studies (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013:64). Yin (2014:28), similarly, described the research design as the plan that guides the researcher in the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting results.

The first step in the research design is to select the research approach. In collecting primary data, there are two research approaches that the researcher can follow: the qualitative or quantitative research approach (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019:4).

4.2.4.1 Qualitative and quantitative research

The difference between these two research approaches is that a **qualitative** research approach is a research approach that addresses the objectives through techniques that enable the researcher to present detailed interpretations about certain situations or phenomena (Rahi, 2017:2). Qualitative research is used to collect in-depth detail about a particular topic (Yin, 2014:218). According to Smith and Zook (2016:17), qualitative research involves an in-depth, unstructured exploration with either small groups of individuals (focus group) or individuals on a one-to-one basis (in-depth interviews). Qualitative research is based on non-numeric data and the meanings are expressed by words (Palic, Vignali, Hallier, Stanton &, Radder, 2015:33).

Quantitative research can be defined as a research approach that addresses the research objectives through an empirical assessment that uses numerical data to report the findings from the research (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019:5). Similarly, Cronin *et al.* (2015:5) pointed out that quantitative data is based on numerical data and quantified data.

Quantitative research also involves the collection of primary data from a large number of respondents with the intention to generalise about a specific population, and the findings are subjected to mathematical analysis (Rahi, 2017:2). Quantitative research uses surveys based on a representative sample of the target population (Smith & Zook, 2016:174). Table 4.2 below presents a comparison between the quantitative and qualitative research approach.

Table 4.2: Qualitative versus quantitative research approach

Research aspect	Qualitative research	Quantitative research
Purpose	Discovery of ideas, thoughts or feelings; understanding of relationships, ideas and objects.	Tests hypotheses or specific research questions.
Types of questions	Probing, unstructured, open-ended.	Limited probing, mostly structured.
Sample size	Small sample.	Large sample to produce generalisable results.
Approach	Observe and interpret.	Measure and test.
Data collection approach	Unstructured.	Structured response.
Requirements of administration	Interviewer must have special skills. Results are subjective.	Interviewer with fewer special skills or no interviewer. Results are objective.
Types of data analysis	Subjective and interpretative.	Statistical and summation.
Hardware or tools	Projection devices, video recorders, tape recorders, pictures, discussion guides.	Questionnaires, computers, printouts.
Types of research	Exploratory.	Descriptive and causal.

Source: Adapted from Leedy & Ormrod (2014:98)

This study adopted a quantitative research approach because the research approach is descriptive in nature (as discussed in the section below). It provides a more general understanding of a problem and the data is collected from a large number of respondents (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013:135; Allen, 2017:2). The researcher intended to assess the responses from the respondents to understand their perceptions of service quality at the LSCs.

4.2.4.2 Types of research design

The second step in the research design is to select the most appropriate type of research design. There are three types of research design, namely, exploratory, descriptive and causal research (Rahi, 2017:2). Figure 4.2 depicts the types of research design.

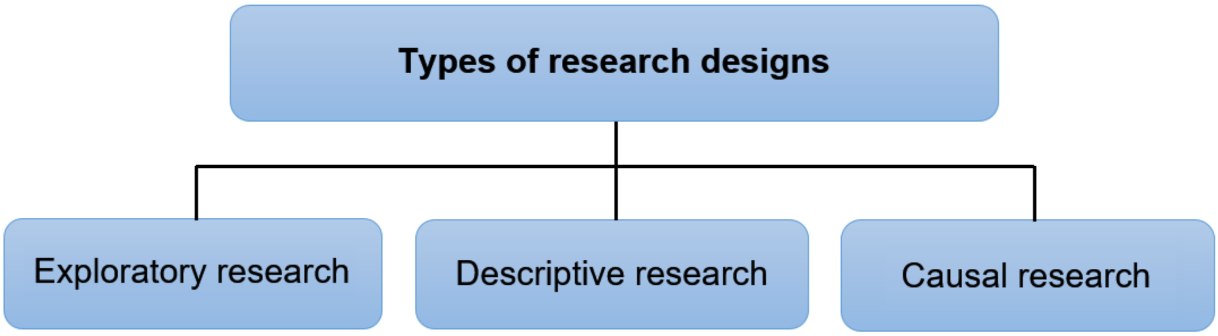

Figure 4.2: Types of research designs

Source: Adapted from Zikmund *et al.* (2013:50)

Each type of research designs as indicated in Figure 4.2 is discussed next.

- **Exploratory research design**

  An exploratory research design is used when the researcher wants to gain insight into the nature of the research problem (Palic *et al.*, 2015:24). This research design is used when the primary objective is to identify problems, clarify ambiguous situations or to investigate ideas that might create business opportunities (Kumar, 2015:159). Faulkner and Faulkner (2019:8) point out that exploratory research is useful when the researcher requires more information about a specific problem or opportunity at hand. Exploratory research is often qualitative in nature, which will enable the researchers to uncover any underlying ideas and/or motivations that respondents might have about the topic at hand (Rahi, 2017:2). As exploratory research is qualitative in nature, and its main objective is to identify problems or investigate opportunities, it was not suitable for this study.

- **Causal research design**

  Causal research designs are used to discover cause-and-effect relationships between two or more variables (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:132). The research objective of causal design is that it requires the researcher to determine which independent variables affect dependent variables (Blythe, 2014:180). More specifically, the researcher may investigate whether one variable causes another variable to change or occur. A causal research design is used when the research objective is to discover the cause and the outcome, therefore, it was not adopted for this study.

- **Descriptive research**

  Descriptive research is used to describe objects, people, groups or environments, and attempts to answer the who, what, where, when and how questions (Wiid & Diggines, 2013:56). In descriptive research, the researcher performs an in-depth examination of the attitudes and behaviour of the respondents (Kumar, 2015:22). Descriptive research also describes the specific details of a position, situation, participants or phenomenon.

  The research methods used in descriptive research are structured, quantitative in nature, and the approaches include surveys (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019:9). The two methods that can be used in descriptive research include either longitudinal or cross-sectional studies (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014:194; Babbie, 2016:106).

  - Longitudinal studies involve a repetitive measurement of the same sample of elements at different points in time.
  - Cross-sectional studies involve the collection of information from one sample of the population at a particular time and the same respondents cannot be re-used for the same study.

The current study followed descriptive research design, as it is used to describe the situation being studied (Edgar & Manz, 2017:133). In addition, this is a cross-sectional study; the information collected from the selected respondents at the LSCs was used only once. The purpose of this study is to describe consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality.

The last step in the research design focuses on how the researcher collected the primary data.

4.2.4.3 Determine the data-collection approach

After selecting a research design for the study, the researcher has to determine how the data will be collected in order to achieve the research objectives. Baker (2014:152) described three ways in which a researcher can collect the data, namely, through observation, experimental research and a survey, as explained below:

- **Observation research**

  Observation research is the systematic process of recording the behavioural patterns of people, objects and occurrences without a researcher questioning or communicating with respondents (Maree, 2016:91). According to Armstrong and Kotler (2015:134), observation involves gathering primary data by observing people, their behaviour or actions and situations. The researcher collects the information through direct observation without the knowledge of the individuals being observed (Blythe, 2014:177). Maree (2016:91) stated that during observations, there are no questions asked, and the researcher can interpret only the respondents' behaviour that is directly witnessed.

- **Experimental research**

  According to Edgar and Manz (2017:132), experimental research examines the cause-and-effect relationship between variables and it is used in a causal research design. Experimental research is conducted when the researcher measures the impact of independent variables and their effect on the dependent variables (Blythe, 2014:180). Experimentation allows the researcher to demonstrate that a change in a dependent variable may be attributed solely to the change in an independent variable (Creswell, 2014:13).

- **Survey research**

  A survey is a research method used to collect the information from individuals to achieve the study's objectives (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014:195). The information collected from the public may be used to develop new products and improve services (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014:195). Maree (2016:174) described a survey as a research technique in which a sample is interviewed or the behaviour and of respondents is observed and described in some way.

Creswell (2014:155) pointed out that survey research provides a quantitative or numeric description of the attitudes or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population. Surveys involve collecting primary data using structured questions that require respondents to choose from a set of predetermined answers. The predetermined questions can be asked verbally, in writing, or via an online platform (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019:111). Surveys are mostly used where a large number of respondents is drawn and to assess their responses to questions (Creswell, 2014:155).

This study selected a survey research as the appropriate data-collection method that would allow the study to achieve its objectives. A survey research provides a quick, efficient and accurate means of assessing information about a population (Armstrong & Kotler, 2015:135). Faulkner & Faulkner (2019:112) highlight several advantages of using surveys as a data-collection method:

- Survey research has the ability to reach a large number of people quickly, thus making it an efficient way to collect data.
- Surveys are relatively easy to administer and are cost-effective.
- Survey research is flexible. It has ability to reveal factors that are not directly observable, such as attitudes, beliefs and behaviour.

The survey methods that a researcher can use to collect data are personal, mail, telephone and online surveys (Kumar, 2015:205), as illustrated in Figure 4.3.

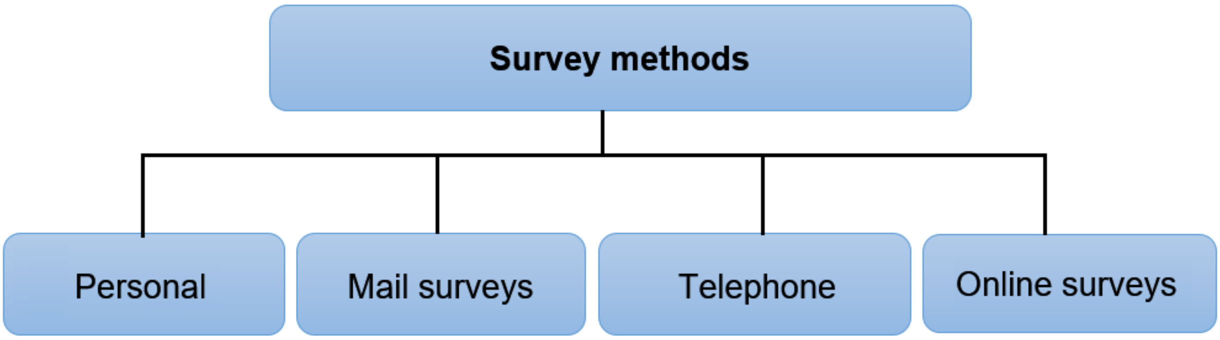

Figure 4.3: Types of survey methods

Source: Adapted from Kumar (2015:205)

The survey methods that a researcher can use to collect data (Figure 4.3) are discussed as follows:

- **Personal surveys:** a survey that is conducted by a trained interviewer in a face-to-face encounter (Kumar, 2015:216). The respondents are usually intercepted in a location and asked to complete a questionnaire. This can be with or without the interviewer being present during the completion of the questionnaire.
- **Mail surveys:** a type of survey in which the questionnaire is mailed to the selected respondents who complete the survey and post it back (Kumar, 2015:213).
- **Telephone surveys:** a survey in which the interviewer contacts and interviews selected respondents on the telephone (Blythe, 2014:171).
- **Online surveys:** survey methods where the researcher uses the internet to deliver and collect the information from respondents (Edgar & Manz, 2017:137).

Table 4.3 compares the advantages and disadvantages of each survey method.

Table 4.3: Advantages and disadvantages of survey methods

Survey methods	Advantages	Disadvantages
Personal survey	▪ This method has the highest response rate. ▪ The interviewer can assist to clarify questions that are not clear. ▪ Long questionnaires can be used.	▪ This method can be cost and time-consuming to train interviewers. ▪ The interviewer can be biased.
Mail survey	▪ It is easy to administer and cost-effective. ▪ Respondents can complete the questionnaire at a convenient time.	▪ Low response rate. ▪ The interviewer cannot assist with problems the respondents may experience.
Telephone survey	▪ This method is quick to administer. ▪ The response rate is usually high. ▪ Respondents can be reached across long distances.	▪ The method can be expensive. ▪ The interviewer may influence responses (risk of interviewer bias).
Online survey	▪ Online survey is quick and cheaper to administer. ▪ Interviewer bias can be eliminated.	▪ Low response rate. ▪ The interviewer is not present to assist in answering the questions.

Source: Adapted from Maree (2016:176).

The personal survey method was used in this current study, as it is considered to be the most flexible method for collecting primary data (Kumar, 2015:216). The interviewer approached the respondents in a face-to-face encounter as they left the LSC and asked them to participate in the survey. The next section focuses on the instrument that the researcher used to collect the data.

4.2.4.4 Determine the data-collection instrument

Due to a survey being selected as the data-collection approach, a questionnaire was appropriate as the data-collection instrument. A questionnaire is an instrument used for collecting data about variables of interest in a study. It consists of a number of questions or items that a respondent reads and answers (Babbie, 2016:248). Questionnaires can be categorised into two types, namely, interviewer administered and self-administered surveys.

- Interviewer administered questionnaires: a type of survey in which the interviewer invites the respondents to answer questions asked by the interviewer about the specific study (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013:119). The researcher is present to clarify any misunderstandings experienced by the respondents regarding the questionnaire.
- Self-administered questionnaires: this survey allows the respondents to read and answer the questions by themselves without the interviewer being present or involved (Kumar, 2015:207). Self-administered questionnaires remove a source of potential bias in the responses, and make it simpler for respondents to be honest about sensitive subjects (Blythe, 2014:171).

For the purpose of this study, a self-administered questionnaire was used as the data-collection instrument to collect primary data because it is the most cost-effective and quickest to administer (Babbie, 2016:278).

4.2.4.5 Determine the data-collection method

The intercept survey method was used to collect the data. An intercept survey involves respondents being intercepted at a public space following the specific experience being studied. It is based upon specifications that might provide helpful and meaningful information for the researcher (Kumar, 2015:207). The consumers were intercepted as they left the LSC after acquiring the services. Those who were willing to participate in the survey were given a questionnaire to complete.

The next step in the research process is to design the sample plan for the study.

4.2.5 Step 5: Design the sampling plan

Brynard *et al.* (2014:56) defined sampling as the process of selecting a suitable representative unit from the total population. Sampling is a very important aspect of the research process (Kumar, 2015:296). When designing the sampling plan, there is a five-steps sampling process that the researcher needs to follow. Figure 4.4 illustrates the sampling process.

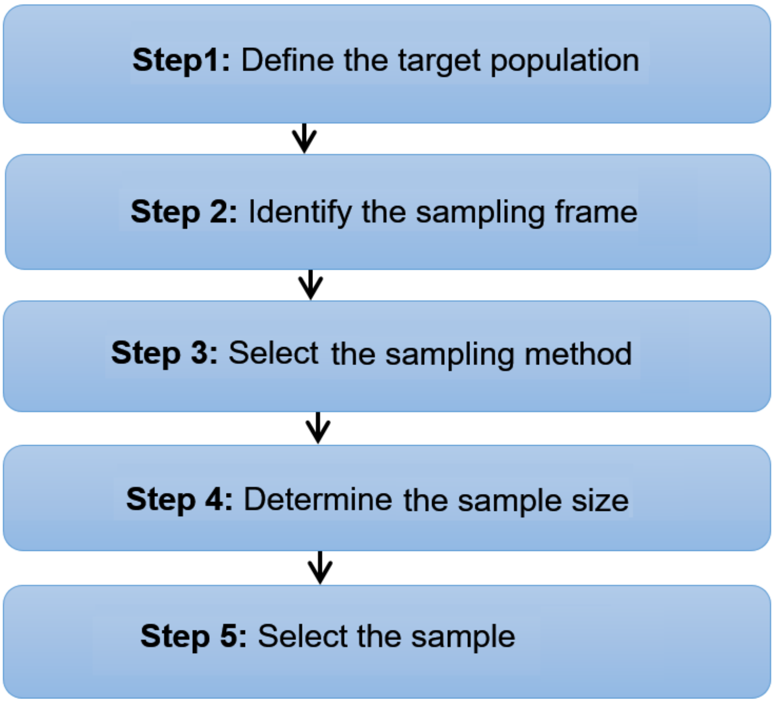

Figure 4.4: The sampling process

Source: Adapted from Kumar (2015:273)

The sampling process illustrated in Figure 4.4 is briefly discussed next.

- **Step 1: Target population**

  The target population is the group of individuals, persons, objects or items from which samples are taken for measurement (Rahi, 2017:3). The target population for the current study consisted of Tshwane residents who visit the LSC to acquire licensing services.

- **Step 2: Identify the sampling frame**

  After defining the target population, the sample frame needs to be identified. Babbie (2016:201) described a sample frame as the list of all members in the target population from which the sample is drawn. Identifying the sampling frame is an important part of sampling (Allen, 2017:2). Brynard *et al.* (2014:56) indicate that the sampling frame should be a true representation of the target population.

Since this study employed a non-probability sampling method, a sampling frame was not used, but the researcher's discretion was used when drawing the sample. The consumers who visited the LSC were asked to participate in the study after they had encountered the service. The survey was conducted at the three selected LSCs, considering the fact that they offer services directly to the public, unlike the Saambou and Metro-Police HQ LSCs that offer bulk services to businesses and government departments (City of Tshwane, 2015).

- **Step 3: Sampling method**

After identifying the sampling frame, the sampling method that the study will use needs to be selected. The researcher has to consider aspects such as ease, speed and cost when selecting a sampling method (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:348). Baker (2014:153) states that there are two types of sampling method that a researcher can use when drawing a sample, namely, probability and non-probability sampling. Figure 4.5 illustrates the types of sampling methods and the classification of sampling techniques.

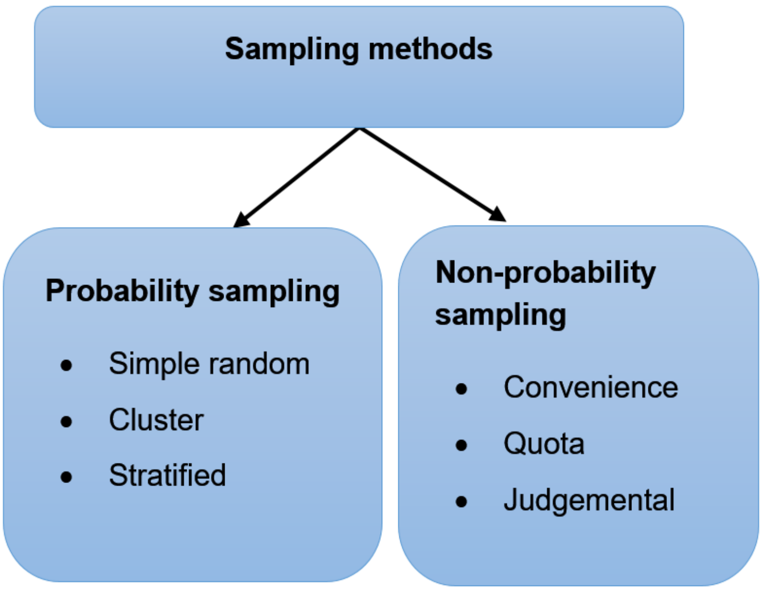

Figure 4.5: Classification of sampling techniques

Source: Adapted from Saunders *et al.* (2016:276)

The types of sampling methods and sampling techniques as illustrated in Figure 4.6 are discussed below.

Probability sampling

Probability sampling means every individual of the population has an equal chance of being selected as part of the sample (Kumar, 2015:275). Baker (2014:153) pointed out that probability sampling is divided into the following sampling techniques, namely, simple random sampling, cluster sampling, stratified sampling and systematic sampling.

- Simple random sampling is a probability sampling technique whereby every member of the population has an equal and independent chance of being selected to be part of the sample.
- Stratified sampling is used when the target population is divided into numbers of subgroups (strata) based on the characteristics relevant to the specific research project. Stratified sampling ensures that the sample will be representative of the population.
- Cluster sampling is a technique in which the target population is divided into similar groups and each group or cluster represents a mini-population. For cluster sampling, the sampling frame is the complete list of clusters, while for stratified sampling, a complete list of all members of the cluster that have been selected in the sampling process are interviewed.
- Systematic sampling is a sampling method whereby the individuals of a population are selected at regular intervals. For example, every nth number of the list is selected.

Before deciding on a sampling technique, a researcher must first consider the advantages and disadvantages of each method. The advantages and disadvantages of probability sampling techniques are presented in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Advantages and disadvantages of probability sampling

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages
Simple random sampling	▪ The method is easily understood by the researcher. ▪ This method is easy to conduct when the required sampling frame and the target population list are available.	▪ This method is costly and time-consuming.
Cluster sampling	▪ It is easy to administer, time and cost-effective.	▪ It is difficult to compute and interpret the results. ▪ It can be biased.
Stratified sampling	▪ It is a precise sampling method. ▪ This method includes all the important subpopulations.	▪ This method can be expensive.
Systematic sampling	▪ Easy to draw a sample.	▪ Systematic sampling can decrease the representativeness of the target population.

Source: Adapted from Saunders *et al.* (2016:291).

After considering the advantages and disadvantages of the probability sampling techniques, the researcher should choose an appropriate sampling technique. However, if the researcher finds none of the above methods satisfactory, she/he may select a non-probability sampling technique which are discussed next.

Non-probability sampling

Non-probability sampling means the likelihood of selecting every individual from the population is unknown (Saunders *et al.,* 2016:276). Baker (2014:153) states that in non-probability sampling, the researcher does not know the population size, therefore each individual does not have an equal chance of being selected to participate in a particular study.

Non-probability sampling is classified into four sampling techniques, namely, convenience sampling, quota sampling, judgement sampling and snowball sampling (Kumar, 2015:278), as discussed below.

- Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the respondents are selected because they are easily accessible to the researcher.

- Quota sampling is used when the researcher selects the respondents that represent certain characteristics in the population.
- Judgemental (purposive) sampling is a sampling technique whereby the members are chosen based on a researcher's opinion or judgement.
- Snowball sampling is used when the sample members are selected and then asked to give a list of names of additional members who meet the population characteristics.

Table 4.5 presents the advantages and disadvantages of each non-probability sampling technique.

Table 4.5: The advantages and disadvantages of non-probability sampling

Technique	Advantages	Disadvantages
Convenience sampling	▪ This method is simple to administer. ▪ The method is cost and time-effective.	▪ The researcher may be biased. ▪ The sample may not be representative of the target population.
Quota sampling	▪ The sample can be controlled if certain characteristics are included.	▪ The researcher may be biased when selecting sample members. The selected sample may not represent the target population.
Judgemental (Purposive) sampling	▪ This method is convenient, time and cost-effective. ▪ Certain characteristics within the sample can be controlled.	▪ Judgemental sampling does not allow for generalisation. ▪ The researcher may be subjective when selecting sample members.
Snowball sampling	▪ Snowball sampling allows the researcher to obtain sample members with similar characteristics through referrals or networking.	▪ The sample may not be representative of the target population. ▪ This method is time-consuming.

Source: Adapted from Kumar (2015:283).

The researcher should consider the advantages and disadvantages of each non-probability sampling technique before choosing the most suitable technique.

This study used a non-probability convenience sampling method to select consumers who are readily available at the various LSCs to participate in the survey. The reason for using convenience sampling to select the respondents is because the respondents were accessible to the researcher and the sampling technique is quick, easy and cheap to use (Kumar, 2015:280).

- **Step 4: Sampling size**

Once the sampling method has been selected, this step will determine the sampling size. Sample size refers to a subset of elements from a large group of the target population (Wolf, Joye, Smith & Fu, 2016:2). According to Allen (2017:3), the researcher must select a sample that is big enough to cover a precise estimation of the population values, but at the same time can be executed economically and practically. Brynard *et al.* (2014:58) added that large samples enable researchers to draw more representative respondents, reach more accurate conclusions and make more accurate predictions than when using small samples.

This study aimed to obtain a large sample size of 350 respondents from the three targeted LSCs. The targeted sample was required to meet the following requirements:

- Men and women residing within the COT municipality, who visit LSCs to acquire licensing services.
- Men and women who can speak, read and understand English.
- Men and women between the ages of 18 and 65 years.

Furthermore, in establishing an appropriate sample size, an analysis was undertaken of the sample size used by previous researchers in similar studies, such as that of Yousapronpaiboon (2014) (sample size of 350); Le and Fitzgerald (2014) (sample size of 300) and Dsouza *et al.* (2018) (sample size of 300). Based on these studies, a sample of 350 respondents was considered sufficient for the analysis of data to generate reliable findings.

The last step in the sampling process is to draw the sample.

- **Step 5: Select the sample**

According to Wiid and Diggines (2013:204), this step in the sampling process involves the selection of respondents that take part in the data collection. A sample of 350 was drawn from the three LSCs.

After completing the sampling process, the next step is to design the research instrument.

4.2.6 Step 6: Design the research instrument

The research instrument is considered to be a tool that is used to collect data from the selected sample (Brynard *et al.*, 2014:37). A questionnaire was used as the research instrument in this study. A total of 350 questionnaires were handed out to the respondents selected based on convenience sampling, of which 262 were returned, presenting 74% response rate.

Babbie (2016:248) described a questionnaire as a research tool or instrument used to collect information from respondents. Allen (2017:2) states that questionnaires are mostly used to gather data from interviews, mail, telephone and online surveys, as discussed in Section 4.2.3.2.

A questionnaire has two types of question structures that the researcher can use to collect data, namely, open-ended and closed-ended questions (Maree, 2016:180). The types of question structures are explained next.

4.2.6.1 Open-ended or unstructured questions

Open-ended questions are those questions that allow the respondents to reply openly in their own words (Baker, 2014:155). Open-ended questions are used mostly in exploratory research when the researcher is seeking is to gain insight into the nature of the research problem (Kumar, 2015:257). According to Kotler and Keller (2016:129), open-ended questions are the best when the researcher wants to learn how the respondents think, to discover what is really important to them, or to get an answer to a question with many possible answers. Below is an example of an open-ended question:

1. How do you think the LSC can improve their quality of service?

Although, open-ended questions allow respondents to answer the questions in their own way without being led to provide a set of responses, these questions are time-consuming to administer. It is also expensive to edit and code the data obtained from asking open-ended questions (Maree, 2016:180). For this study, the researcher did not include open-ended questions in the questionnaire.

4.2.6.2 Closed-ended or structured questions

With closed-ended questions, the respondents are provided with a number of choices or alternative answers to the questions. The respondents must select one out of a number of possible answers (Blythe, 2014:173, Baker, 2014:155). Maree (2016:183) stated the following advantages of using closed-ended questions:

- It presents a set of response alternatives and response format, and requires the respondents to make a selection from a list of responses.
- Structured questions take less time to administer and are easy to analyse.
- The results of the investigation can be available fairly quickly.

The examples of closed-ended or structured questions are dichotomous, multiple-choice and rating questions (Maree, 2016:181).

- **Dichotomous questions:** these questions have only two response possibilities and should be kept to a minimum (Cooper & Schindler, 2014:329). In the questionnaire, this question was used to ask the respondents about their visit at the LSCs (See the qualifying questions at the beginning of the questionnaire). Below is an example of this type of question:

  1.Have you received service from any of the following LSCs?

  - Waltloo
  - Centurion
  - Akasia

Yes	1
No	2

  → If yes, please continue with the survey.

  → If no, please do not continue further with the survey.

- **Multiple-choice, single response questions**: in these questions, more than two alternatives are provided but the respondent can select only one response and it does not require the respondents to use their own words (Brace, 2013:46). A multiple-choice question is used to obtain information that can be divided logically into reasonably fixed categories. In the questionnaire, this question was used to ask respondents for their age group, racial group, highest education qualification and occupation (See Appendix D, Section B, demographic profile). Below is an example of a multiple-choice, single response question:

2. What is your age group?

18-30	1
31-40	2
41-50	3
51-65	4

- **Multiple-choice, multiple response questions**: these questions are similar to multiple-choice, single response questions in that there more than two alternatives are provided. In these questions, the respondent can choose more than one response, as shown in the example below:

3. Which of the following LSCs have you visited before?

   You may choose more than one option.

   - Waltloo
   - Akasia
   - Centurion
   - Saambou
   - Metro-Police Headquarters
   - Other

However, this type of question was not included in the questionnaire.

- **Rating questions**: these questions are mainly used to obtain information of a subjective nature, for example, about perceptions and opinions. The respondents rate how strongly they agree or disagree with the statements provided by choosing one option. These are known as Likert scales (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019:114). In the questionnaire, this question was used to ask the respondent to evaluate their perception of service quality at the LSCs (See Appendix D, Section A, question 3.1-3.22). Below is an example of a Likert-scale response question:

4. The LSC has modern equipment.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5

For the purpose of this study, closed-ended questions were used to collect the primary data. A closed-ended questionnaire was developed from the SERVPERF instrument proposed by Cronin and Taylor in 1992, as it is still the most used instrument to measure service quality (Adedamola *et al.*, 2016:318; Roy & Saha, 2015:2). The questionnaire included a cover letter describing the nature, purpose of the study and a consent form that the respondents had to complete.

The questionnaire comprises of two sections.

- Section A contains 22 question statements in which the respondents evaluate the perceptions according to the five dimensions of service quality, namely, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Each item in the questionnaire was measured on a five-point Likert scale, representing a range of perceptions from 1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree (Faulkner & Faulkner, 2019:114).
- Section B of the data-collection instrument includes questions about the personal profile/ demographics of the respondents, including gender, educational level, age and occupation. Nardi (2014:89) recommends that demographic questions should come at the end of the questionnaire because after fatigue or impatience with completing a questionnaire, most respondents prefer to end the session checking boxes that are simple to answer.

It is important that the research instrument be tested on a small sample before data collection. ‘Pre-testing’ is described as the testing of the questions on a small sample of respondents in order to improve the questionnaire by identifying and eliminating problems (Wolf *et al.,* 2016:2). The questionnaire was pre-tested on 10 respondents selected randomly at the LSC to detect and determine whether the wording of the questions was appropriate and clear. The questionnaire were handed out to the respondents to complete and return them immediately upon completion. After the pre-test, the researcher adjusted the questions that presented problems or bias, or that were not clear, and eliminated those that were not relevant.

The reliability and validity of the questionnaire should always be considered when testing a questionnaire (Brynard *et al.*, 2014:49). In this study, the reliability and validity of the questionnaire were also measured to determine the degree to which the questionnaire actually measured what the researcher was trying to measure, and to determine whether the study was deemed reliable. Saunders *et al.* (2016:451) pointed out that for a questionnaire to be valid it must be reliable.

Reliability occurs when the instrument measures the same thing repeatedly and provides consistent results (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2014:31). Cronbach's alpha is commonly used to measure the internal reliability of the questionnaire and was also used in this study (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:451). Cronbach's alpha is generally used to measure the consistency of responses to a set of questions (scale items) that are combined as a scale to measure a particular concept, and its measurement value is between 0 and 1 (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:451). Reliability can be interpreted as follows:

- A value of 0.7 and above indicates that the reliability is good.
- A value between 0.6 and 0.7 indicates that reliability is fair.
- A value below 0.6 indicates that reliability is poor.

Validity is all about the instrument's ability to actually measure what it is supposed to measure (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2014:31). Testing a questionnaire for validity is about asking whether the questions adequately addressed the objectives of the study (Wiid & Diggines, 2013:192). Saunders *et al.* (2016:202) pointed out that the researcher should consider the following criteria when testing validity:

- Content validity refers to the correctness, relevance and appropriateness of the questions in the measuring instrument. The questions should address the research objectives of the study and duplication of questions should be avoided.
- Predictive validity, also known as criterion-related validity, is concerned with the questions' ability to make accurate predictions. For example, predictive validity is obtained when the questions intended to measure consumers' future buying behaviour have been tested to measure that it rightfully predicts buying behaviour.
- Construct validity refers to the extent to which the set of questions measure the presence of the construct the researcher intended them to measure. Examples of constructs are attitude scales and desired information.

In this study, content validity tested whether the questions in the questionnaire addressed the research objectives. The questionnaire was developed from the SERVPERF instrument to measure service quality, as it has been used by previous studies, and it has been proven to be a valid and reliable instrument to measure service quality (Msosa, 2015; Mackay & Major, 2017; Deneke, 2015; Hamid & Yip, 2019).

The questionnaire is available in Appendix D. After testing the research instrument, the next step as shown in Figure 4.1 is to conduct the fieldwork.

4.2.7 Step 7: Conduct the fieldwork

The research was conducted at three LSCs within the COT municipality, namely, Waltloo, Akasia and Centurion LSCs. The consumers were intercepted as they left the LSC after acquiring the services. The self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, as indicated in step 5 of 4.2.5 and those who were willing to participate in the survey were requested to fill in the questionnaire and return it after completion. A total of 350 questionnaires were handed out to the respondents at the LSCs selected based on convenience sampling, of which 262 were returned, representing 74% response rate. The respondents were asked to rate the level of service at the LSCs. Once the researcher collected the required data, it was processed and analysed.

4.2.8 Step 8: Process and analyse data

This step in the research process, as illustrated in Figure 4.1, involves the researcher editing, cleaning, coding and tabulating the data in order to process and analyse the data. According to Kumar (2015:304), during the processing and data analysis, the researcher converts the data collected into meaningful information.

After collecting the data, the researcher should choose a data analysis method to analyse the data based on the research objectives. Descriptive statistical analysis is a method used in quantitative research to describe the characteristics of the sample in the numerical data, based on the chosen constructs and demographical variables (Maree*,* 2016:204). Maree (2016:204) further added that that descriptive statistics are used to organise, summarise and interpret data in a meaningful way.

Inferential statistical analysis helps the researcher to draw conclusions about the population based on the data describing a sample drawn from that population (Maree, 2016:220). Thematic statistical analysis is a method used to analyse qualitative data. Furthermore, thematic analysis allows the researcher to search for themes (patterns) that may occur within a whole data (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:579).

In this study, descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyse the collected data, as guided by the research objectives and the quantitative nature of the study. Saunders *et al.* (2016:527) enable the researcher to describe and compare the variables numerically. The data was captured in excel and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS), Version 25 for Windows. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise data of a sample across a wide range of variables using nominal, ordinal, interval scales and ratio. Descriptive analysis was used to calculate the mean, standard deviation, frequencies and Cronbach's Alpha. A t-test and ANOVA were also used to draw conclusion about the population.

The next step, which is the last step in the research process as indicated in Figure 4.1, focuses on interpreting the results and preparing the report.

4.2.9 Step 9: Interpret the results and prepare the report

This step in the research process involves interpreting the results from the analysed data and preparing a report of the study. Wiid and Diggines (2013:313) described the interpretation as the transformation of the research results into integrated and meaningful general findings. The research findings of this study will be presented in the next chapter.

4.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations identified in the current study are explained as follows:

- Due to time and budget constraints, the study had to focus on a sample from three LSCs within the COT municipality. With a larger budget and more time at hand, the researcher would have been able to conduct the research on a much bigger scale in other municipalities in the Gauteng province.
- Given that a non-probability sampling method was used to draw the sample from the target population of this study, the results and conclusions are not representative of the entire population at large.
- Due to the limited previous research conducted on service quality at the LSCs, the researcher relied on preceding studies on service quality from other public sectors and other sectors of economy.

4.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The rights, values and interests of the respondents were respected when conducting this research. The study complied with the ethical measures of the University of South Africa Policy on Research Ethics (2013:03).

The following ethical measures were adhered to when conducting the research:

- The authorisation to conduct the research at the LSCs within the COT municipality was granted by the management as attached in Appendix B. The management made a provision that the findings of the research made available to the department once the study has been completed.
- Ethical clearance to conduct the research study was obtained from the Department of Marketing and Retail Management at the University of South Africa. The ethical clearance certificate is attached in Appendix A.
- The researcher ensured that the questionnaire does not contain any questions harmful or hurtful to the respondents.
- A letter informing the respondents that participation in the survey is voluntary and they have the right to withdraw at any point without negative consequences was issued.
- The researcher obtained consent from the selected respondents and requested them to sign the consent letter as attached in Appendix C before completing the questionnaire. The purpose of the research and the duration of the survey were outlined to the respondents.
- The researcher declared that all information collected would be kept confidential.

4.5 SUMMARY

This chapter provided the discussion of the research methodology used in this study. The steps of the research process were discussed in detail, including the selection of the research design, research approach, data collection and sampling methods. The research followed a quantitative method and is descriptive in nature. The non-probability, convenience sampling method was chosen and the SERVPERF questionnaire was used to collect primary data as it is the most used instrument. The data analysis technique that the researcher employed was also discussed. The limitations of the study and the ethical considerations followed in this study are explained. The next chapter presents and interprets the research results of this study.

CHAPTER 5:
RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the methodology used in this study. The purpose of this chapter is to present the analysis of the findings and interpret the results relative to the research objectives of this study. This chapter will start by stating the research objectives of this study, followed by the sample description and sample realisation. The descriptive statistical analysis of the demographics is presented, followed by descriptive statistics of the service quality dimension, and then the results of the reliability of the measuring instrument.

As explained in Chapter 1, the primary research objective of this study was to determine consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. In order to realise the primary research objective of this study, secondary research objectives were formulated. The secondary research objectives formulated from the primary objective were stated as follows:

- To determine consumer perceptions of all the tangible aspects at the LSCs.
- To assess the level of employees' reliability as perceived by LSCs consumers.
- To examine consumer perceptions of employees' responsiveness at the LSCs.
- To measure the level of employee's assurance as perceived by consumers at the LSCs.
- To evaluate consumer perceptions regarding the employees' empathy at the LSCs.
- To establish the difference between the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs in terms of their gender, age and race.

The next section discusses the sample description and sample realisation.

5.2 SAMPLE DESCRIPTION AND REALISATION

The study was conducted at three selected LSCs, namely, Waltloo, Centurion and Akasia, within the COT municipality. Because of the quantitative nature of this study, a large sample was drawn. According to Cooper and Schindler (2014:374), a larger sample is required in a quantitative study using descriptive surveys. Hence, a larger sample was targeted in this study.

A total of 350 questionnaires were handed out to the respondents selected based on convenience sampling to complete and return them after completion. The sample of 350 was deemed sufficient by the Bureau of Marketing Research (BMR). The sample size was consistent to similar research studies, such as that by Yousapronpaiboon (2014) (sample size of 350), Debasish and Dey (2015) (sample size of 300), Dsouza *et al.* (2018) (sample size of 300), and Saneva and Chortoseva (2018) (sample size of 360). In addition, these studies also made use of quantitative descriptive statistics to analyse their data.

It was important that the selected respondents were representative in proportion to the population. The study used non-probability sampling, therefore the results obtained from this study cannot be generalised to the entire population (Smith & Zook, 2016:174). However, the data provided through the sampling method depicts accurate estimates of the characteristics of the population, as shown in Section 5.3.1. Table 5.1 depicts the sample realisation rate.

Table 5.1: The sample realisation rate

LSC	Targeted sample size	Realisation rate	Realisation percentage
Waltloo		95	36.5%
Centurion		93	35.5%
Akasia		74	28%
Total	**350**	**262**	**100%**

Table 5.1 shows that the majority of the respondents 36.5% (n=95) visited the Waltloo LSC, followed by 35.5% (n=93) of the respondents from the Centurion LSC, and then 28% (n=74) of the respondents from the Akasia LSC.

A total of 350 questionnaires were handed out to the respondents selected based on convenience sampling, of which only 262 questionnaires were returned, representing a 74% response rate. This responses rate conforms to Babbie's (2016:261) guideline for a good response rate of at least 65%.

A question was asked to determine the reason for the respondents' visit to the LSCs, and it was stated in the questionnaire as follows: Please indicate the main reason why you visited this LSC.

Table 5.2: Main reason for visiting the LSC

Option	Number of respondents	Percentage
Registration and licence of motor vehicle	70	26.7%
Deregistration of motor vehicle	14	5.3%
Motor vehicle clearance test	10	3.8%
Application of learner's licence test	17	6.5%
Application and renewal of drivers' licence	117	44.7%
PrDP application and renewal	14	5.3%
Other	20	7.6%

n= 262.

Table 5.2 above shows that the majority of the respondents (44.7%, n=117) visited the LSCs for the application and renewal of drivers' licence, while 26.7% (n=70) came for the registration and licensing of motor vehicle. The deregistration of motor vehicle and PrDP application and renewal had the same score of 5.3% (n=14). A minority of respondents (3.8%, n=10) visited the LSCs for motor vehicle clearance tests. The next section presents the descriptive statistics.

5.3 DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive statistics is a method used in quantitative research to describe the characteristics of the sample in the numerical data, based on the chosen constructs and demographical variables (Maree, 2016:204). The descriptive statistics regarding the demographic information derived from Section B of the questionnaire used in this study is presented in the next section.

5.3.1 Demographic information

A total of 350 questionnaires were handed out to the respondents, of which 262 were returned, representing a 74% response rate. This section discusses the demographic information of the respondents in terms of gender, age group, racial group, education qualification and occupation.

5.3.1.1 Gender

Figure 5.1 provides a graphical illustration of the gender representation of respondents in the study.

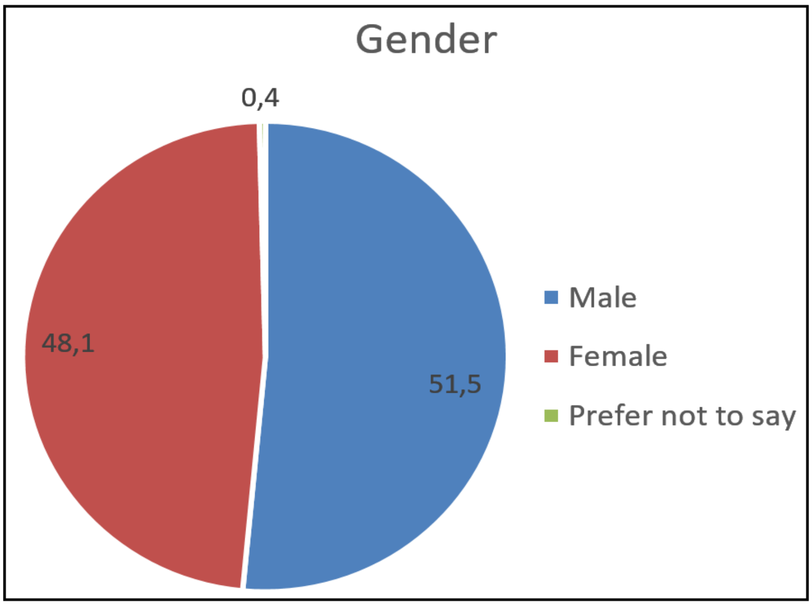

Figure 5.1: Gender

Figure 5.1 shows that male respondents represented the majority at 51.5% (n=135), followed by female respondents at 48.1% (n=126), and the respondents who prefer not say represented the minority at 0.4% (n=1).

It is evident that in this sample more males visited LSCs, than females and others who prefer not to give their gender.

5.3.1.2 Age group

Figure 5.2 provides a graphical illustration of the age group representation of respondents in the study.

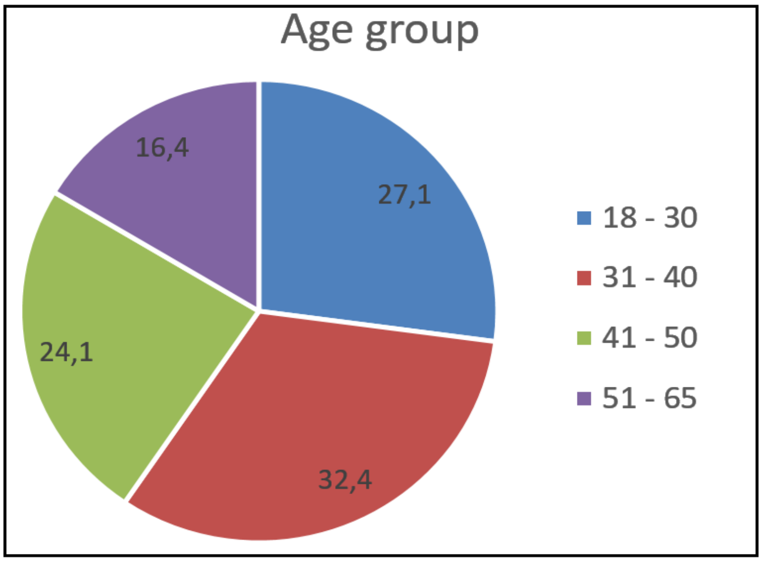

Figure 5.2: Age group

In terms of the age group as indicated in Figure 5.2, 27.1% (n=71) of the respondents were in the age group 18-30, while 32.4% (n=85) of the respondents were in the age group 31-40, and 24.1% (n=63) of the respondents were in the age group 41-50. The lowest percentage 16.4% (n=43) of the respondents were in the age group 51-65. It can be concluded that most of the respondents were middle-aged.

Table 5.3 on the next page presents a cross-tabulation of the respondents' age and gender.

Table 5.3: Cross-tabulation of respondents' age and gender

			Gender			Total
			Male	Female	Prefer not to say	
Age	18-30	**Count**	**37**	**34**		**71**
		% within Gender	52.1%	47.9%	0%	100%
		% within Age	27.4%	27.0%	0%	27.1%
		% of Total	**13.5%**	**14.4%**	**0%**	**27.9%**
	31-40	**Count**	**47**	**38**		**85**
		% within Gender	55.3%	44.7%	0%	100%
		% within Age	34.8%	30.2%	0%	32.4%
		% of Total	**19.5%**	**13.4%**	**0%**	**32.9%**
	41-50	**Count**	**28**	**34**	**1**	**63**
		% within Gender	44.4%	54.0%	1.6%	100%
		% within Age	20.7%	27.0%	100%	24.1%
		% of Total	**12.0%**	**12.8%**	**0.7%**	**25.5%**
	51-65	**Count**	**23**	**20**		**43**
		% within Gender	53.5%	46.5%	0%	100%
		% within Age	17.0%	15.9%	0%	16.4%
		% of Total	**5.8%**	**8.0%**	**0%**	**13.8%**
		Total Count	**135**	**126**	**1**	**262**
		Total % within Gender	51.5%	48.1%	0.4%	100%
		Total % within Age	100%	100%	100%	100%
		Total % of Total	**51.5%**	**48.1%**	**0.4%**	**100%**

Table 5.3 indicates that within the classification of ages 18-30 years, 27.4% of the respondents were male and 27.0% were female. In the age classification of 31-40 years, 34.8% of the respondents were male and 30.2% were female. The table further reveals that within the age group of 41-50 years, 20.7% of the respondents were male and 27% were female.

In terms of gender, there was 1 individual within the age group of 41-50 years who preferred not to say. Within the age group of 51-65 years, 17.0% of the respondents were male and 15.9% were female. Overall, 51.5% of the population were male, whereas 48.1% were female and 0.4% preferred not to say. These results show that a difference in terms of age can be observed.

5.3.1.3 Racial group

Figure 5.3 provides a graphical illustration of the racial group representation of respondents in the study.

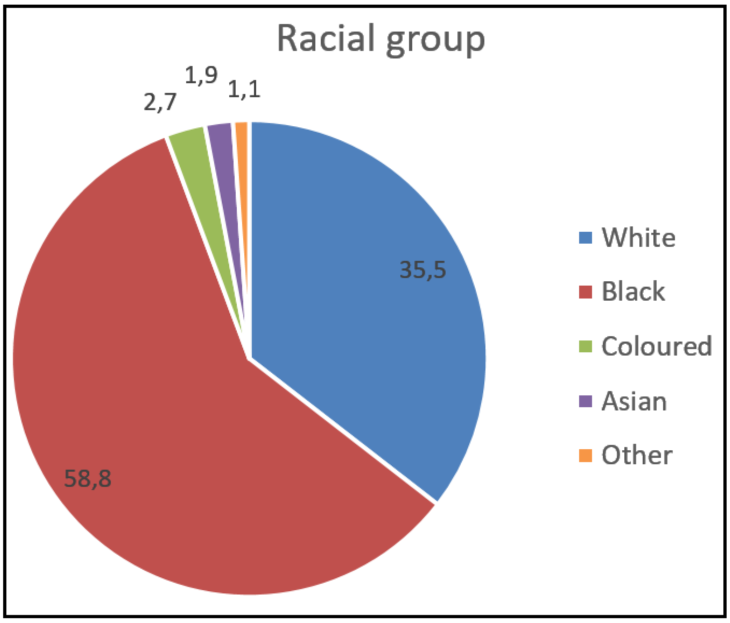

Figure 5.3: Racial group

Figure 5.3 shows that the percentage of White respondents was 35.5% (n=93), followed by Black with the percentage of 58.8% (n=154), while Coloured respondents represented 2.7% (n=7), followed by Asians with 1.9% (n=5). “Other” represented the lowest percentage of 1.1% (n=3).

The findings revealed that more than half of the respondents were Black.

5.3.1.4 Educational qualification

Figure 5.4 presents a graphical illustration of the representation in terms of the educational group of the respondents in the study.

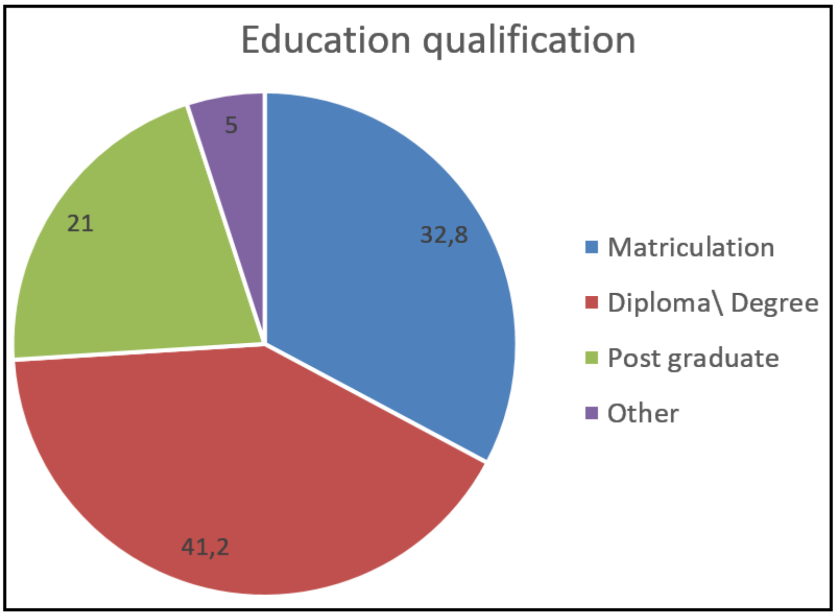

Figure 5.4: Education qualification

As shown in Table 5.4, the percentage of respondents with a Matric was at 32.8% (n=86), those with a Diploma/ Degree was at 41.2% (n=108), while 21% (n=55) of the respondents had a Post-graduate qualification, and lastly, the “Other” option was chosen by 5% (n=13) of the respondents. The findings showed that the Diploma/ Degree was the predominant qualification among the respondents.

5.3.1.5 Occupation

Figure 5.3 presents a graphical illustration of the representation in terms of the occupation of respondents in the study.

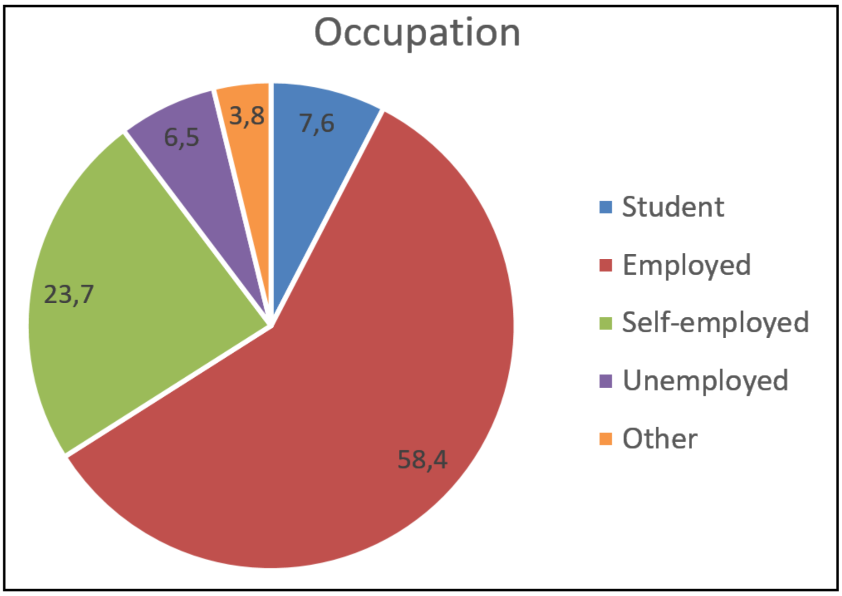

Figure 5.5: Occupation

In terms of occupation as presented in Figure 5.5, a percentage of 7.6% (n=20) were Students, followed by Employed respondents at 58.4% (n=4), and Self-employed respondents at 23.7% (n=62). The percentage of those who are Unemployed was at 6.5% (n=17), and lastly, the "Other" option was chosen by 3.8% (n=10) of the respondents.

The findings indicated that more than half of the respondents were employed. The next sections presents the analysis of the consumer perception of service quality, and the descriptive statistical analysis of the service quality dimensions.

5.3.2 Descriptive statistics on service quality dimensions

This section presents the descriptive results and interpretations related to the service quality dimensions as derived from Section A of the questionnaire used in this study. The section presents the analysis of the consumers' responses regarding the perception of the service quality dimensions at the LSCs.

There are 22 statements that were used measure the perception of service quality. The statements in each dimension were measured on a five-point Likert scale, representing a range of attitudes from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5). Each dimension's results are presented in detail in the sections below.

5.3.2.1 Secondary research objective 1

Table 5.4 presents the results that address **Secondary research objective 1**, namely: *To determine consumer perceptions of all the tangible aspects at the LSCs.*

Table 5.4: Tangibility

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
LSCs have modern equipment	17.2% (n=45)	21.4% (n=56)	21,8% (n=57)	33.6% (n=88)	6.1% (n=16)
The physical facilities are visually appealing	13.4% (n=35)	29.8% (n=78)	17.6% (n=46)	32.4% (n=85)	6.9% (n=18)
The staff are neat and have a professional appearance	7.6% (n=20)	16.0 (n=42)	18.3% (n=48)	45.4% (n=119)	12.6% (n=33)
Materials, such as signage are visually appealing	13.7% (n=36)	22.9% (n=60)	17.6% (n=46)	37.0% (n=97)	8.8% (n=23)

The dimension of Tangibility had four question statements in the questionnaire that the respondents were asked to assess when measuring service quality. Table 5.4 above reveals the results of the statements where the respondents rated tangibility at the LSCs.

Of the respondents, 39.7% (n=104) agreed that the LSCs have modern equipment, while 38.6% (n=101) disagreed, and 21.8% (n=57) were uncertain. These results are a concern, as out of the total responses of the respondents, 60.4% (n=158) disagreed or were uncertain that the LSCs have modern equipment.

Of the respondents, 39.3% (n=103) agreed that the physical facilities are visually appealing, while 43.2% (n=113) of the respondents disagreed about it, and 17.6% (n=46) were uncertain. These findings show that most of respondents, 60.8% (n=159), either disagreed or were uncertain that the physical facilities are visually appealing, which is surprising and creates a concern.

More than half of the respondents, 58.0% (n=152) agreed that the LSCs staff are neat and have a professional appearance, while 23.6% (n= 62) of the respondents disagreed, and a further 18.3% (n=48) were uncertain. This reveals that a total of 41.9% (n=110) of the respondents either disagreed or were uncertain. These results indicate that the majority of the respondents rated the appearance of the staff at the LSCs positively.

Of the respondents, 45.8% (n=120) agreed that materials, such as signage, were visually appealing, while 36.6% (n= 96) disagreed, and 17.6% (n=46) were uncertain. These findings indicate that most of the respondents, 54.2% (n=142), were not convinced that the signage is visually appealing at the LSCs.

Overall, it shows that the respondents were neutral or negative about the tangibility at the LSCs.

5.3.2.2 Secondary research objective 2

The results displayed in Table 5.5 address **Secondary research objective 2**, outlined as follows: *To assess the level of employees' reliability as perceived by LSCs' consumers.*

Table 5.5: Reliability

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
When the staff promise to deliver the appropriate service, they keep that promise.	14.1% (n=37)	16.8% (n=44)	24.4% (n=64)	34.4% (n=90)	10.3% (n=27)
The staff show sincere interest in resolving consumers' problems.	13.0% (n=34)	19.5% (n=51)	19.8% (n=52)	38.2% (n=100)	9.5% (n=25)
The staff perform the services right the first time.	10.7% (n=28)	20.6% (n=54)	14.5% (n=38)	43.5% (n=114)	10.7% (n=28)
The staff deliver the service at the promised time.	16.8% (n=44)	22.5% (n=59)	16.8% (n=44)	33.2% (n=87)	10.7% (n=28)
The LSCs maintain error-free records.	11.5% (n=30)	18.7% (n=49)	42.0% (n=110)	20.6% (n=54)	7.3% (n=19)

The literature maintains that Reliability is the most important determinant of the perception of service quality among consumers (Anwowie *et al.*, 2015:151; Rani & Kannan, 2016:39). The dimension of Reliability had five question statements that the respondents were asked to rate. Table 5.5 indicates the respondents' rating of the reliability offered by the staff at the LSCs.

The results show that 44.7% (n=117) of the respondents agreed that when the LSC staff promise to deliver the appropriate service, they keep that promise, while 30.9% (n=81) of the respondents disagreed with this statement, and 24.4% (n=64) were uncertain. These results indicated a negative response, as more than half of the respondents 55.3% (n=145) either disagreed or were uncertain that the LSC staff keep their promises and deliver the appropriate service.

Of the respondents, 47.7% (n=125) agreed that the staff show sincere interest in resolving consumers problems, while 32.5% (n=85) disagreed and 19.8% (n=52) were uncertain. In total, 52.3% (n=137) either disagreed or were uncertain about this, and these findings indicate that the respondents were to a degree unhappy with the LSC staff and felt that they did not show an interest when resolving their problems.

More than half (54.2%, n=142) of the respondents agreed that the staff perform the services right the first time, while about 31.3% (n=82) disagreed, and 14.5% (n=38) were uncertain. Although these findings indicate a positive response, since the majority agreed that the staff perform the services right the first time, 45.8% (120) were not happy.

Of the respondents, 43.9% (n=115) agreed that the staff deliver the service at the promised time, while 39.3% (n=103) disagreed, and 16.8% (n=44) were unsure about it. These findings suggest that the respondents were not satisfied, as more than half of the respondents (56.1%, n=147) did not agree or were uncertain that the staff deliver the service at the promised time.

Of the respondents, 27.9% (n=73) agreed that the LSCs maintain error-free records, while 30.2% (n=79) disagreed with the statement. However, it is surprising to notice that about 42.0% (n=110) of the respondents were uncertain that the LSCs maintain error-free records. Based on these results from the question, it is evident from these findings that the respondents were not happy or were undecided about the reliability of the staff at the LSCs.

5.3.2.3 Secondary research objective 3

The results presented in Table 5.6 address **Secondary research objective 3**, namely: *To examine consumer perceptions of employees' responsiveness at the LSCs.*

Table 5.6: Responsiveness

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
The staff inform consumers when the service will be performed.	14.5% (n=38)	19.5% (n=51)	14.5% (n=38)	41.2% (n=108)	10.3% (n=27)
The staff provide consumers with prompt service.	15.6% (n=41)	22.9% (n=60)	14.1% (n=37)	37.0% (n=97)	10.3% (n=27)
The staff are always willing to listen and help consumers.	12.6% (n=33)	17.6% (n=46)	16.8% (n=44)	42.7% (n=112)	10.3% (n=27)
The staff are always ready to respond to consumer's requests.	11.8% (n=31)	17.2% (n=45)	20.2% (n=53)	40.5% (n=106)	10.3% (n=27)

The respondents were asked to rate four questions in terms of the Responsiveness of the staff at the LSCs. Table 5.5 indicates that most of the respondents (51.5%, n=135) were in agreement that the LSC staff inform the consumers when the service will be performed, while 34% (n=89) of the respondents disagreed with the statement, and 14.5% (n=38) were uncertain. Even though 48.5% (n= 127) either disagreed or were uncertain, most of the respondents were happy that they were informed when the service will be performed.

Of the respondents, 47.3% (n=124) agreed that the LSC staff provide consumers with prompt service, while 38.5% (n=101) of the respondents disagreed, and 14.1% (n=37) were uncertain. These negative results reveal that the majority of the respondents (52.6%, n=138) were not convinced that the LSC staff provide consumers with prompt service.

More than half of the respondents (53.0%, n=139) agreed that the LSC staff are always willing to listen and help consumers, while 30.2% (n=79) disagreed, and 16.8% (n=44) were uncertain. Although these results show a slight positive response, 47% (n=123) of the respondents were not impressed that the LSC staff are always willing to listen and to help the consumers.

About 50.8% (n=133) of the respondents were in agreement that the LSC staff are always ready to respond to consumers' requests, while 29% (n=76) disagreed, and 20.2% (n=53) were uncertain. Even though half of the respondents were happy, 49.2% either disagreed or were uncertain that the LSC staff are always ready to respond to consumers' requests, and this is a reason for discomfort.

5.3.2.4 Secondary research objective 4

The results presented in Table 5.7 address **Secondary research objective 4**, namely: *To measure the level of employees' assurance as perceived by the consumers at the LSCs.*

Table 5.7: Assurance

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
The behaviour of LSC staff instils confidence among the consumers.	13.4% (n=35)	20.6% (n=54)	18.3% (n=48)	37.4% (n=98)	10.3% (n=27)
The staff are consistently polite and respectful to me.	12.2% (n=32)	16.8% (n=44)	15.3% (40)	42.4% (n=111)	13.4% (n=35)
The LSC staff have the knowledge to answer the consumer's questions.	7.3% (n=19)	13.4% (n=35)	19.5% (n=51)	46.0% (n=120)	13.8% (n=36)
The staff make consumers feel safe when performing their transactions.	10.3% (n=27)	15.3% (n=40)	16.4% (n=43)	44.7% (n=117)	13.4% (n=35)

There were four question statements in which the respondents were required to rate the assurance of the staff at the LSCs. The results in Table 5.7 indicate that 47.7% (n=125) of the respondents agreed that the behaviour of LSCs staff instils confidence among the consumers, while 34% (n=89) disagreed, and 18.3% (n=48) were uncertain about it. In total, 52.3% (n=137) either did not agree or were uncertain that the behaviour of LSC staff instils confidence among them, therefore this indicates that the respondents were not impressed.

More than half of the respondents (55.7%, n=146) were in agreement that the staff at the LSCs are consistently polite and respectful to them, while 29% (n=76) disagreed, and only 15.3% (n=40) were uncertain. Even though 44.3% (n=116) either disagreed or were uncertain, the majority of the respondents were happy that the staff is always polite and respectful towards them.

Of the respondents, 59.5% (n=156) also agreed that the LSC staff have the required knowledge to be able to answer the consumers' questions, while 20.7% (n=54) disagreed, and 19.5% (n=51) were uncertain. As only 40.2% (n=105) either disagreed or were uncertain, this result therefore suggests that the respondents were positive that the LSC staff have the required knowledge to answer their questions.

Most of the respondents (58.0%, n=152) also agreed that the staff at the LSCs make them feel safe when performing their transactions, while 25.6% (n=67) disagreed with the statement, and 16.4% (n=43) were uncertain. This positive response shows that the respondents were happy that the staff make them feel safe when performing their transactions, regardless of the 42% (n=110) who did not agree or were uncertain.

Based on the results of the statements in Table 5.5 above that were used to rate assurance, it is evident that the respondents agreed with the assurance offered by the LSC staff, even though nearly half of the respondents disagreed or were unsure.

5.3.2.5 Secondary research objective 5

The results presented in Table 5.8 address **Secondary research objective 5**, which is stated as follows: *To evaluate consumer perceptions regarding the employees' empathy at the LSCs.*

Table 5.8: Empathy

Statement	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree
The staff give the consumer individual attention.	13.0% (n=34)	17.6% (n=46)	13.4% (n=35)	42.4% (n=111)	13.7% (n=36)
The LSC staff are sympathetic and care about consumers' needs.	13.0% (n=34)	20.2% (n=53)	21.0% (n=55)	35.1% (n=92)	10.7% (n=28)
The staff have the consumer's best interest at heart.	12.2% (n=32)	20.2% (n=53)	26.8% (n=70)	32.8% (n=86)	8.0% (n=21)
The LSC staff understand the specific needs of their consumers.	11.5% (n=30)	17.6% (n=46)	19.1% (n=50)	43.5% (n=114)	8.4% (n=22)
The LSCs' operating hours are convenient to the consumers.	17.6% (n=46)	16.4% (n=43)	14.9% (n=39)	38.9% (n=102)	12.2% (n=32)

In terms of Empathy, the respondents were asked five questions to rate the service quality at the LSCs. Table 5.8 shows that more than half of the respondents (56.1%, n=147) agreed that the LSC staff give consumers individual attention, while 30.6% (n=80) disagreed with the statement, and 13.4% (n=35) were uncertain about it. Although these results point to a positive remark, 44% (n=115) of the respondents either disagreed that the LSCs give consumers individual attention or were uncertain.

Secondly, 45.8% (n=120) of the respondents agreed that the LSC staff are sympathetic and care about the consumer's needs, while 33.2% (n=87) disagreed, and 21.0% (n=55) were uncertain. These results raise an alarm that a total of 54.2%

(n=142) of the respondents either did not agree or were uncertain that the LSC staff are sympathetic and care about the consumer's needs.

Of the respondents, 40.8% (n=107) agreed that the LSC staff have the consumer's best interest at heart, while 32.4% (n=85) disagreed, and 26.8% (n=70) were uncertain. A total of 59.2% (n=155) of the respondents were unsure or not in agreement that the LSC staff have the consumer's best interest at heart, and this also causes discomfort.

About half of the respondents (51.9%, n=136) agreed that the LSC staff understand the specific needs of their consumers, while 29.1% (n=76) disagreed, and 19.1% (n=50) were uncertain. These results indicated that even though almost half of the respondents were satisfied with the service, 48.2% (n=126) either disagreed or were uncertain that the LSC staff understand the specific needs of the consumers.

Lastly, 51.1% (n=134) of the respondents agreed that the LSCs' operating hours are convenient to the consumers, while 34% (n=89) disagreed, and 14.9% (n=39) were uncertain. This clearly shows that 51.1% (n=134) of the respondents agreed about the convenience of the operating hours at the LSCs, while 48.9% (n=128) disagreed or were uncertain.

Above all, the results revealed that the respondents were generally satisfied with the Empathy of the LSC staff, even though some respondents either disagreed or were uncertain.

Secondary research objective 6 is addressed in Section 5.6. The next section discusses the reliability and validity of the research instrument.

5.4 INTERNAL CONSISTENCY RELIABILITY

Reliability occurs when the instrument measures the same thing repeatedly and provides consistent results (O'Reilly & Kiyimba, 2014:31). Cronbach's alpha is commonly used to measure the internal reliability of the questionnaire and will be used in this study (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:451). As explained in Chapter 4, Cronbach's alpha is used to measure the consistency of responses to a set of questions (scale items) that are combined as a scale to measure a particular concept with a measurement value of between 0 and 1 (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:451). Reliability can be interpreted as follows:

- A value of 0.7 and above indicates that the reliability is good.
- A value between 0.6 and 0.7 indicates that reliability is fair.
- A value below 0.6 indicates that reliability is poor.

The results of the reliability are presented in Table 5.9 below:

Table 5.9: Internal consistency reliability of measurement scales

Dimension	Cronbach's alpha	Reliability
Tangibility		
1. LSCs have modern equipment		
2. Physical facilities are visually appealing	**0.856**	**Good**
3. The staff are neat and have a professional appearance		
4. Materials, such as signage, are visually appealing		
Reliability		
5. When the staff promise to deliver the appropriate service, they keep that promise		
6. The staff show a sincere interest in resolving consumers' problems		
7. The staff perform the services right the first time	**0.912**	**Good**
8. The staff deliver the service at the promised time		
9. The LSCs maintain error-free records		
Responsiveness		
10. The staff inform consumers when the service will be performed		
11. The staff provide consumers with prompt service	**0.907**	**Good**
12. The staff are always willing to listen and help consumers		
13. The staff are always ready to respond to consumers' requests		
Assurance		
14. The behaviour of LSC staff instils confidence among consumers		
15. The staff are consistently polite and respectful to me	**0.920**	**Good**
16. The LSC staff have the required knowledge to answer consumers' questions		
17. The staff make consumers feel safe when performing		

Dimension	Cronbach's alpha	Reliability
transactions		
Empathy		
18. The staff give consumers individual attention		
19. The LSC staff are sympathetic and care about the consumer's needs		
20. The staff have the consumer's best interest at heart	**0.915**	**Good**
21. The LSC staff understand the specific needs of their consumers		
22. The LSCs' operating hours are convenient to the consumers		

Table 5.9 above shows the Cronbach's alpha of 0.856 for tangibility, which was measured with four statements, 0.912 for reliability measured with five statements, 0.907 for responsiveness with four statements, 0.920 for assurance with four statements, and 0.915 for empathy measured with five statements.

In following the advice provided by Saunders *et al.* (2016:451) regarding the calculation of a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.7 and above as a good indicator of reliability, all these results revealed that the reliability is good for all service quality dimensions. Based upon the presented results, it can be concluded that the measurement scales used in this study are both reliable and valid and the overall mean scores could be calculated for the constructs. Furthermore, based upon the presented results, assurance had the highest reliability with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.920, followed by empathy with 0.915, then reliability with 0.912, and responsiveness with 0.907. Tangibility had the lowest Cronbach's alpha value of 0.856.

The next section presents and discusses the overall mean scores for each dimension of service quality.

5.5 OVERALL SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSION ANALYSIS

In order to measure service quality dimensions, the mean scores of all service quality dimensions needed to be determined. The representation of the means provides a clear understanding about the consumers' perceptions of service quality. This implies that the larger the mean scores, the higher the perception of service quality, whereas the smaller the mean score, the lower the perception of service quality.

Table 5.10 shows the mean and standard deviation scores of the service quality dimensions measured in this study.

Table 5.10: Mean and standard deviation scores of the service quality dimensions

Dimension	Mean	Standard deviation
Tangibility	3.0582	0.99554
Reliability	3.0733	1.03182
Responsiveness	3.1441	1.09575
Assurance	3.2996	1.07342
Empathy	3.1450	1.06106

n = 262

Table 5.10 demonstrates that the perception of all the service quality dimensions has a mean score of around 3, which is the middle score when using five-point Likert scales. Tangibility has a mean score of 3.054, reliability has a mean score of 3.073, responsiveness has mean score of 3.144, assurance has a mean score of 3.299, and empathy has a mean score of 3.145.

The results show that assurance had the highest mean value of 3.299, while tangibility had the lowest mean value of 3.058, and the other service quality dimensions had a mean value of around 3.1. The overall mean scores of the service quality dimensions represent consumer perceptions of the service quality delivered at the LSCs. The results mean that the respondents' perception of the service quality lies around a score of 3, which indicates that the consumers are largely neutral (neither agree nor disagree) with the level of service quality at LSCs. This may imply that the consumers are uncertain about the perceived service quality at the LSCs, and require that improvements need to be made.

5.6 SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GROUPS

In order to achieve Secondary research objective 6**,** which is to establish the difference between consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs in terms of their gender and age, significant testing was conducted. Significant testing determines the statistically significant differences between the mean scores of different groups of respondents (age, gender and race). The level significance of p≤ 0.05 is used to test the hypothesis whether the researchers could be 95% confident that the differences between the means of groups are also evident in the target population. The level of significance indicates statistical significance in terms of specific probability (Kumar, 2015:326).

For the purpose of this study, the level for a statistical significance of $p \leq 0.05$ was used. If the p-value is equal or less than 0.05, the result means there is a statistical significant difference between the variables.

The results in this section focus on revealing statistically significant differences between consumers at LSCs and the respondents' demographics (gender and age). The significant difference on race was not tested in this study, as the numbers were too small for some of the race categories.

5.6.1 Significant differences in service quality dimensions in terms of gender

Table 5.11 provides the results for the significant testing undertaken to uncover statistically significant differences between groups based upon gender, age and the service quality dimensions.

The results in Table 5.11 provide the following findings:

- Tangibility and gender: An Independent samples t-test was conducted to discover whether a statistically significant difference exists between the means of males (3.143) and females (2.976) with respect to the tangible aspects at LSCs. A p-value of 0.072 signifies that a statistically significant difference between the means of males and females with respect to tangibility is not evident.
- Reliability and gender: An Independent samples t-test was conducted to discover whether a statistically significant difference exists between the means of males (3.111) and females (3.041) with respect to reliability at LSCs. A p-value of 0.150 signifies that a statistically significant difference between the means of males and females with respect to reliability does not exist.

(The discussion of the results continues below Table 5.11 on the next page.)

Table 5.11: Significant differences between genders with respect to the service quality dimensions

Variable	Category	Tangibility		Reliability		Responsiveness		Assurance		Empathy	
		Mean	p-value	Mean	p-value	Mean	p-value	Mean	p-value	Mean	p-value
Gender	Males	3.143	0.072	3.111	0.150	3.201	0.520	3.348	0.882	3.136	0.956
	Females	2.976		3.041		3.091		3.58		3.162	

*indicates statistically significant differences between the means of the groups (p-value equal or less than 0.05)

- Responsiveness and gender: An Independent samples t-test was conducted to discover whether a statistically significant difference exists between the means of males (3.202) and females (3.091) with respect to the responsiveness expected at the LSCs. A p-value of 0.520 signifies that a statistically significant difference between the means of males and females with respect to responsiveness as a service quality dimension does not exist.
- Assurance and gender: An Independent samples t-test was executed to discover whether a statistically significant difference exists between the means of males (3.348) and females (3.258) with respect to assurance at the LSCs. A p-value of 0.882 signifies that a statistically significant difference between the means of males and females with respect to assurance is not evident.
- Empathy and gender: An Independent samples t-test was conducted to discover whether a statistically significant difference exists between the means of males (3.136) and females (3.162) with respect to empathy at the LSCs. A p-value of 0.956 signifies that a statistically significant difference between the means of males and females with respect to empathy does not exist.

Overall, the p-values of the tested hypotheses were above 0.05 which means there were no significant differences amongst the service quality dimensions in terms of gender.

5.6.2 Significant differences in service quality dimensions in terms of age groups

Table 5.12 presents the results for the significant testing undertaken to uncover statistically significant differences between the age groups and the service quality dimensions.

Table 5.12: Significant differences between age groups in terms of service quality dimensions

Variable	Category	Tangibility		Reliability		Responsiveness		Assurance		Empathy	
		Mean	**p-value**	**Mean**	**p-value**	**Mean**	**p-value**	**Mean**	**p-value**	**Mean**	**p-value**
Age	18 to 30 years	3.446	0.007*	3.445	0.054*	3.521	0.079	3.702	0.016*	3.556	0.084
	31 to 40 years	3.464		3.443		3.528		3.693		3.472	
	41 to 50 years	3.016		3.121		3.165		3.255		3.203	
	51 years to 65 years	3.135		3.191		3.364		3.511		3.314	

*indicates a statistically significant difference between the means of the groups (p-value equal or less than 0.05)

- A One-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences exist between the means of the different age groups on tangibility, 18-30 years (mean = 3.446), 31-40 years (mean = 3.464), 41-50 years (mean = 3.016) and 51-65 years (mean = 3.135) with respect to the tangible aspects at LSCs. The p-value of 0.007, which is < 0.05, points out that a statistically significant difference between the means of the different age groups with respect to the tangible aspects at LSCs is evident. This means that the respondents rated tangibility differently in terms of their age groups.
- A One-way ANOVA was executed to determine whether statistically significant differences exist between the means of the different age groups on reliability, 18-30 (mean = 3.445), 31-40 (mean = 3.443), 41-50 (mean = 3.121) and 51-65 (mean = 3.135) with respect to reliability. The p-value of 0.054, which is = 0.05, points out that a statistically significant difference between the means of the different age groups with respect to reliability does exist, as the p-value is more close and equivalent to 0.05. This means that the respondents rated reliability differently according to their respective age groups.
- A One-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences exist between the means of the different age groups on the responsiveness of staff at LSCs, 18-30 (mean = 3.521), 31-40 (mean = 3.527), 41-50 (mean = 3.164) and 51-65 (mean = 3.363) with respect to the responsiveness at LSCs. The p-value of 0.079, which is > 0.05, points out that a statistically significant difference between the means of the different age groups with respect to the responsiveness is not evident. This means that the respondents rated responsiveness in the same manner in terms of their age groups.
- A One-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences exist between the means of the different age groups on assurance as a service quality dimension, 18-30 (mean = 3.702), 31-40 (mean = 3.693), 41-50 (mean = 3.254) and 51-65 (mean = 3.511) with respect to assurance. The p-value of 0.016, which is < 0.05, indicates that a statistically significant difference between the means of the different age groups with respect to assurance exists. This means the respondents rated assurance differently considering their respective age groups.

- A One-way ANOVA was conducted to determine whether statistically significant differences exist between the means of the different age groups on empathy, 18-30 (mean = 3.556), 31-40 (mean = 3.472), 41-50 (mean = 3.203) and 51-65 (mean = 3.314) with respect to empathy. The p-value of 0.084 is > 0.05, which points out that a statistically significant difference between the means of the different age groups with respect to empathy does not exist. This means the respondents rated empathy in the same manner, irrespective of their age groups.

Overall, significant differences existed on three service quality dimensions, namely, tangibility, reliability and assurance when the age groups of the respondents were taken into account. There was no significant difference on empathy and responsiveness when the age groups of the respondents were considered.

5.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the results derived from the quantitative study conducted explaining the sample description and sample realisation, descriptive analysis of the demographic profiles of the respondents and on the service quality dimensions. The internal consistency reliability and validity of the data-collection instruments used in this study was also presented. The quantitative results captured the consumers' perceptions of the service quality dimensions at LSCs within the COT municipality. In addition, this chapter presented the results related to the existence and non-existence of significant differences on the service quality dimensions in terms of gender and race.

The next chapter provides the discussions, conclusions and recommendations derived from the results presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER 6:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The primary research objective of this study as explained in Chapter 1 was to determine the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. The aim of this chapter is to summarise the findings relative to each research objective of this study, and to make conclusions and recommendations based on the results. The limitations of this study are discussed and lastly, the chapter suggests areas for future research.

6.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary research objective of this study was to determine the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. In order to achieve the primary research objective, the formulated secondary research objectives were realised. The findings addressing the secondary research objectives of this study are presented below.

6.2.1 Secondary research objective 1

To determine consumer perceptions of all the tangible aspects at the LSCs.

Tangibility, as discussed in Chapter 2, is described as the consumer's perception of all the tangible aspects of the service, such as the appearance of the physical facilities, equipment, employees and communication materials (Ismail & Yunan, 2016:269). The results as presented in the previous chapter revealed that the respondents mostly either disagreed or were uncertain about the tangibility at the LSCs.

Tangibility received the lowest mean score of 3.0582 if compared to the other dimensions' mean scores, and this shows that tangibility had the lowest perception of service quality. This implies that there is a concern that the LSCs should have modern equipment, the physical facilities should be visually appealing and the appearance of staff should be neat and professional. Mukhles (2016) conducted a study measuring employees' perspective of service quality in hotels. In that study, similar to this study, the findings also indicated that tangibility received the lowest score in terms of the perception related to service quality. Qazi *et al* (2017) conducted research assessing the service quality at a public dental hospital and the findings revealed the greatest gap on tangibility as a service quality dimension. Moletsane *et al*. (2014) examined the community's expectations and perceptions of the service quality of South African Municipality and uncovered that service quality dimension of tangibility to be low. This indicated that the perceptions of the hotel's employees, hospital's patients and South African community towards the tangible aspects were unsatisfactory. These results are consistent with the findings of the current study, as the respondents were not convinced about the tangible aspects at the LSCs.

6.2.2 Secondary research objective 2

To assess the level of employees' reliability as perceived by LSCs' consumers.

Reliability is about the organisation's ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately (Ramphal & Nicolaides, 2014:4). The literature states that reliability is the most important determinant of the perception of service quality among consumers (Anwowie *et al.*, 2015:151; Rani & Kannan, 2016:39). In this study, the findings revealed that the respondents mostly either disagreed or were uncertain about the reliability of the staff at the LSCs.

Reliability had a mean score of 3.0733, which can be considered as fairly average. This implies that the LSC staff may be underperforming in showing sincere interest when resolving consumers' problems, keeping the promise to deliver the appropriate service, performing the services right the first time, and delivering the service at the promised time.

Moletsane *et al*. (2014) examined the community's expectations and perceptions of the service quality of South African Municipality and uncovered quality gaps for all service quality dimensions, including reliability. Naidoo (2015) conducted a study with the aim of investigating the perception of service quality between staff and students at five universities, and the results revealed quality gaps for all the dimensions, including reliability. The staff and students were dissatisfied with the reliability at all the universities. The results of this current study are in line with those of the preceding study, as the consumers were not entirely impressed with the reliability of the LSCs staff.

6.2.3 Secondary research objective 3

To examine consumer perceptions of employees' responsiveness at the LSCs.

Responsiveness refers to the employees' willingness to help and respond to the consumer's needs (Hung, 2016:56). The findings of this study disclosed that the respondents agreed with many of the statements in terms of responsiveness. Even though the results may be positive, almost half of the respondents disagreed and were uncertain about the responsiveness of the staff, and this is clearly a cause for concern.

Responsiveness received a mean score of 3.1441, which still lies around 3 and this indicates that the respondents may be slightly uncertain whether the LSC staff provide prompt service, are always willing to listen and help consumers, and respond to their requests.

Kansara (2020) conducted a study measuring the quality of services offered by the water supply department in a municipal corporation and the results revealed that there was a service gap between what the consumer expected and what was delivered in terms of the responsiveness of the employees. Kumar and Mishra (2015) conducted a study measuring service quality in public sector banks and their findings showed uncertainty in the responsiveness dimension. Overall, this indicated that there were service gaps in each dimension that the banks need to close in order to improve the service. These results are consistent with the findings of the current study, as the respondents are uncertain about the responsiveness of the LSC staff.

6.2.4 Secondary research objective 4

To measure the level of employees' assurance as perceived by consumers at the LSCs.

Assurance is related to the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence among the consumers (Abdelkrim & Salim, 2015:128). The findings showed that the respondents agreed with the statements about assurance. Although, the response was positive, there is still concern because almost half of the respondents either disagreed or were uncertain about the assurance of the LSC staff.

Assurance had the highest mean score of 3.299 if compared to the other service quality dimensions. This indicated that the respondents were slightly positive about the LSC staff consistently being polite and respectful, having the required knowledge to answer consumers' questions, and instilling confidence and making consumers feel safe when performing their transactions.

These results are in line with the studies conducted by Green (2014) measuring service quality in higher education, and that of Karekar, Tiwari and Agrawal (2015) comparing the service quality between private and government hospitals. The findings of both these studies revealed that assurance, as a service quality dimension, was rated the highest, as it seems that the students at the university and the patients at the private hospital were impressed with the assurance of the staff members. These results are consistent with the findings of the current study, as the respondents were positive about the assurance of the LSC staff.

6.2.5 Secondary research objective 5

To evaluate consumer perceptions regarding the employees' empathy at the LSCs.

Empathy refers to the caring experienced and the degree to which consumers receive individualised service from employees (Mukhles, 2016:190). According to Adetunji *et al.* (2016:31), empathy is about understanding the consumer's personal needs, taking care of them individually, and showing them sympathy.

In terms of empathy, the results of this study confirmed that the respondents agreed with some statements, as presented in the previous chapter. However, the respondents either disagreed or were uncertain regarding other sentences about the empathy of the LSC staff and this also causes a concern.

Empathy had a mean score of 3.1450, and this indicates that the respondents were a bit indecisive but leaning to positive about the empathy of the LSC staff.

Nell and Cant (2014) conducted a study determining students' perceptions regarding the most important service features at a higher education institution. The results revealed that the students rated the empathy dimension as average. Teshnizi *et al.* (2018) conducted a study assessing the quality of health services in Iran, and the results revealed that the patients perceived the smallest service gap in the empathy dimension.

The results of the current study are in line with those of the preceding studies, as the respondents were marginally positive about the empathy of the LSC staff.

6.2.6 Secondary research objective 6

To establish the difference between consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs in terms of their gender and age.

An independent sample t-test and ANOVA was conducted to discover whether statistical differences exist between the service quality dimensions in terms of their gender and age groups. These are discussed below.

6.2.6.1 Significant differences in service quality dimensions in terms of gender

In terms of the perception differences between the genders, the following was found:

- Tangibility and gender: The results revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between the perception of tangibles as a service quality dimension and gender.
- Reliability and gender: The results disclosed that there were no statistically significant differences between the perception of reliability as a service quality dimension and gender.
- Responsiveness and gender: The results discovered that there were no statistically significant differences between the perception of responsiveness as a service quality dimension and gender.
- Assurance and gender: The results discovered that there were no statistically significant differences between the perception of assurance as a service quality dimension and gender.
- Empathy and gender: The results disclosed that there were no statistically significant differences between the perception of empathy as a service quality dimension and gender.

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Eresia-Eke *et al.* (2018) measuring the perception of service quality on campus-based food outlets, where the results indicated that significant differences do not exist in service quality perception in terms of gender. Similarly, a study by Msosa (2015) assessed the perceptions of service quality in the banking sector, and the results also revealed that there were no significant differences between the perceptions of the service quality dimensions and gender. Naude (2015) determined the perceptions and expectations of customers regarding the dining experience dimensions at full-service restaurants, and the findings indicated that there were no significant differences between perceptions of service quality and gender. These results are in line with the findings of the current study as there were no statistical differences between the perceptions of service quality at the LSCs and gender. So there appears to be consistency across studies that gender is not a discriminating factor, and this is supported here.

The perception of service quality dimensions and age groups will be discussed in the next section.

6.2.6.2 Significant differences in service quality dimensions in terms of age groups

The ANOVA test was conducted to determine the significant differences between the perceptions of tangible aspects at the LSCs and the following age groups: 18-30 years, 31-40 years, 41-50 years and 51-65 years. The results confirmed that there was a statistically significant difference between the means of the different age groups with respect to the tangible aspects at LSCs.

Reliability and age groups: The results discovered that there was a statistically significant difference between the means of the different age groups with respect to reliability.

Responsiveness and age groups: The results revealed that there were no statistically significant differences between the means of the different age groups with respect to responsiveness.

Assurance and age groups: The results revealed the existence of a statistically significant difference between the means of the different age groups with respect to assurance.

Empathy and age groups: The results disclosed that there were no statistically significant differences between the means of the different age groups with respect to empathy.

Overall, it may be concluded that there were significant differences between the service quality dimensions and age groups.

Gbandi and Kadiri (2015) conducted a study measuring the perception of service quality in domestic airlines services, and the results revealed that there were statistically significant differences between the perceptions of service quality and age. Rao and Rao (2018) conducted a study determining the perceived service quality on public sector banks, and the findings also revealed that there were statistically significant differences related to the perceptions of service quality and age. Dsouza *et al.* (2018) measured the service quality and customer satisfaction of the banking sector in Goa, and the results revealed that there was significant difference between the perceived service quality and age groups.

The results of the current study are consistent with those of the preceding studies, as there were significant differences between the perception of service quality at the LSCs and age groups.

Based on the secondary objectives, the primary research objective of this study, as mentioned in Section 6.2, was to determine the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. To answer the primary and secondary research objectives, the SERVPERF was used and provided answers to these questions. The results as presented in Chapter 5 revealed that all the service quality dimensions, namely, tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy had a mean score of 3, which implies that consumers rated the quality of service at the LSCs as average.

Therefore, it is recommended that the quality of service at the LSCs should be improved. In addition, the results showed that there were no significant differences between the perception of the service quality dimensions and gender. However, significant differences exist between the three service quality dimensions: tangibility, reliability and assurance and age groups. The next section discusses the recommendations made by this study.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

The consumer perceptions regarding all the service quality dimensions have a mean score of around 3, which is the middle score when using the five-point Likert scales.

This means that the consumers were uncertain about the service quality at the LSCs. On the basis of the results presented in Chapter 5, the following recommendations are presented to improve the service quality at the LSCs.

Tangibility was rated the lowest in terms of the perceptions of service quality if compared to the other dimensions; therefore continuous improvement of all the tangible aspects at the LSCs are still needed. The electronic equipment used at the LSCs, for example, the e-NATIS program, needs to be continuously updated to ensure they are not slow or time-consuming. The new online booking system for learners tests and driver's licence renewal is not convenient for all consumers, therefore it is recommended that walk-ins be allowed in the LSCs for those who prefer it. The physical facilities at the LSCs need to be improved, for example, the eye test machines need to be maintained regularly to avoid the long queues resulting from the limited machines at the LSCs. In addition, the facilities should be kept clean at all times. Materials, such as signage, also needs to be improved at the LSCs and should be visually appealing.

The LSC staff should have an interest in resolving consumers' problems and be reliable at all times. The LSC staff is guided by the service charter, therefore they need to adhere to the principles during service delivery, as mentioned in Chapter 1. The LSC staff should keep the promise of serving the public with the service right the first time. Management need to give compliments, recognition and rewards to the employees who always give their best performance when assisting consumers. It is also recommended that management should ensure that more training should be provided to the staff to enhance the quality of service at the LSCs. For example, customer service training should always be provided to the staff.

The LSC staff need to provide consumers with prompt quality of service and be responsive to consumers' requests. The staff need to inform the consumers about the services they offer and explain when the service will be performed. The LSC staff should always be willing to listen to the consumers' needs and solve their problems. Suggestion boxes should be placed at the LSCs, which will enable them to identify consumers' concerns and suggestions. The management need to ensure that the LSC staff attend workshops on a regular basis to improve their working skills. Top management need to encourage and support the staff to deliver better service and give compliments for a job well done. This can be done through their speeches during staff meetings and when interacting with the staff during work hours.

The consumers need assurance from the LSC and its employees during the service delivery. The LSC staff should have be more knowledgeable about their job so that they are able to answer consumers' questions. The consumers need to be provided with correct and accurate information at all times. The staff should always be friendly, polite and respectful towards the consumers, regardless of their appearance or their status in the society. The LSC staff should also ensure that they have the ability to instil confidence and trust among consumers when assisting them. The best performing staff should receive awards so that they feel appreciated and to enhance their working skills. This further recommends that the staff should be continuously trained to improve their understanding of their work. For example, regular training related to the National Road Traffic Act.

The LSC staff need to learn how to give the consumer individual attention when assisting them. They need to understand that each consumer who visits the LSCs have specific needs that have to be satisfied. The consumers feel at ease when assisted by people they trust, therefore the LSC staff should ensure that they are capable of understanding, that they care about the consumers' needs and have their best interest at heart. The management should encourage the staff to show empathy when assisting consumers.

Overall, this study further recommends that service quality should be created as a part of the long-term goal at the LSCs and that the service quality dimensions should be incorporated as part of the organisational culture. October is transport awareness month in South Africa, therefore campaigns should be held at the LSCs to raise awareness among consumers about the licensing and transport services.

The limitations in this study are presented in the next section.

6.4 STUDY LIMITATIONS

The following limitations were applicable to the study:

- This study took place at three selected LSCs, therefore, the findings of this study were limited to the three selected LSCs that offer services directly to the public rather than those that offer bulk services to businesses and government departments.

- The sample was drawn from consumers who are residing within the COT municipality, and was therefore not geographically representative.
- The study used a non-probability convenience sampling method, therefore the findings of this study cannot be generalised to the entire population, LSCs in other provinces or the whole South Africa.
- Due to limited studies on service quality in public sector, specifically, in LSCs, the researcher relied previous researches in other sectors of the economy.

The next section provides suggestions for future research.

6.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

The focus of this study was on the consumers, therefore future research should be conducted that focuses on employees and managers to capture the different perspectives on the topic. The perspectives of both the consumers and staff would assist in making better inferences regarding the quality of service delivery. The current study focused on the perceptions of service quality at the LSCs, it is recommended that future research determining both the perceptions and expectations of service quality be conducted.

Limited research has been conducted on service quality, especially at the LSCs, therefore future research should be done in this sector. Future studies can be conducted on service quality in other LSCs in other provinces in South Africa, and it would be interesting to perform comparative studies on the LSCs internationally to see what is being done there and how the South African centres compare.

The current study used a quantitative research approach, therefore future research can be conducted using qualitative research to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions related to service quality at the LSCs. Multivariate analysis could be performed on future studies to predict which one of the service quality dimensions has the strongest effect among other variables regarding service quality at the LSCs.

6.6 CONCLUSION

This study focused on determining the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs within the COT municipality. The results of this study revealed that consumers perceived the service at the LSCs as uncertain, which means that the consumers are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the service. Service quality still remains a challenge at the LSCs as mentioned in Chapter 1, therefore this study recommended improvements to the quality of service.

In this chapter, the research objectives and the findings were revisited and discussed in detail. Recommendations were also made to improve the quality of service at the LSCs, followed by the study limitations, and then lastly, suggestions for future research were made.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:
ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND RETAIL MANAGEMENT ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date 15 February 2019

Dear Ms Pebetsi Cleopatra Hlaka

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2019 - 2022

NHREC Registration # : (if applicable)

ERC Reference # : 2019_MRM_002

Name : Ms Pebetsi Cleopatra Hlaka

Student #: 48774871

Staff #: N/A

Researcher(s): Ms Pebetsi Cleopatra Hlaka, 0835949980, pebetsi.cleo@gmail.com

Supervisor (s): Ms Leanne Manley, 0124292643, manlell@unisa.ac.za
Mr Ricardo Machado, 0124294020, machar@unisa.ac.za

Working title of research:

Consumer perception of service quality at the Licensing Service Centres within the Tshwane Municipality

Qualification: Postgraduate degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa Department of Marketing and Retail Management Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for 3 years.

*The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by the Department of Marketing and Retail Management Ethics Review Committee on 14 March 2019 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Department of Marketing and Retail Management Research Ethics Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. Minor changes suggested by the committee be amended on the Form 1.

Note:
*The reference number **2019_MRM_002** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature
Chair of Department of
Marketing and Retail Management ERC
E-mail: jwiid@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429-2381

Signature
Executive Dean: College of Economic and Management Sciences
E-mail: mogalmt@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429-4805

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

APPENDIX B:
AUTHORISATION LETTERS

CITY OF TSHWANE
IGNITING EXCELLENCE

ROADS AND TRANSPORT
Licensing Services

Room A10/11 | Ground Floor |Tshwane Metropolitan Police Department Head Office
Cnr WF Nkomo Street and E'skia Mphahlele Drive | Pretoria | 0002
PO Box 440 | Pretoria | 0001
Tel: 012 358 0173|Fax 086 211 9879
Email: kokkiek2@tshwane.gov.za | www.tshwane.gov.za | www.facebook.com/CityOf Tshwane

My ref:	02/Jan/2018	Tel:	012 358 0172/3
Your ref:		Fax:	086 211 9879
Contact person:	Dr Johan Kok	Email:	Kokkiek2@tshwane.gov.za
Section/Unit:	Licensing Services		

21 February 2019

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT MASTERS RESEARCH AT THE LICENSING SERVICE CENTRES WITHIN THE TSHWANE MUNICIPALITY

To whom it may concern,

I, Dr. Jonan Kok grant permission to Miss Pebetsi Cleopatra Hlaka (Student number: 48774871) to conduct her research in determining consumer perceptions of service quality at the Licensing Service Centres within the Tshwane municipality.

I authorise her to conduct her Masters research at the following licensing service centres namely: Waltloo, Akasia and Centurion as from 13th of February 2019 until the date of completion.

After the completion of the study, the Department of Licensing Services in Tshwane would appreciate if a copy of the results could be made available to it.

Kindest regards

Mr NS Thole
A/DIVISIONAL HEAD: LICENSING SERVICES

On request, this document can be provided in another official language.

CITY OF
TSHWANE
IGNITING EXCELLENCE

Service Delivery Coordinator and Transformation Management
Office of the Director: Licensing Services

Room A10/11 | Ground Floor (Tshwane Metropolitan Police Department Head Office
Cnr WF Nkomo Street and E'skia Mphahlele Drive | Pretoria | 0002
PO Box 440 | Pretoria | 0001
Tel: 012 358 0173|Fax 086 211 9879
Email: kokkiek2@tshwane.gov.za | www.tshwane.gov.za | www.facebook.com/CityOfTshwane

My ref:	may/5/15	Tel: 012 358 0172/3
Your ref:		Fax: 086 211 9879
Contact person:	Dr J Kok	Email: kokkiek2@tshwane.gov.za
Section/Unit:	Licensing Services	

05 May 2015

Attention: Pebetsi Cleopatra Hlaka
Student number: 48774871

AUTHORISATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ON CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY AT THE LICENSING SERVICE CENTERS WITHIN THE CITY OF TSHWANE.

As per your letter dated 29 April 2015, permission is hereby granted to yourself to conduct research in determining consumer perceptions of service quality at the Licensing Services Centers within the City of Tshwane. I authorize the research to be conducted from to date until the completion of the study.

After completion of your research the Department will appreciate if you can make findings available to it.

Kindest regards

Dr J Kok *Pr.Sci.Nat.*
DIRECTOR: LICENSING SERVICES

C40 CITIES

On request, this document can be provided in another official language

APPENDIX C:
RESPONDENT CONSENT FORM

Letter of Introduction and Informed Consent

Department of Marketing and Retail Management

Title of the study:

CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY AT THE LICENSING SERVICE CENTRES WITHIN THE CITY OF TSHWANE MUNICIPALITY.

Dear respondent,

My name is Pebetsi Cleopatra Hlaka (Student number: 48774871) and I am conducting a research towards a MCOM: Business Management with specialisation in Marketing Management at the University of South Africa. You are invited to participate in a study entitled "Consumer perceptions of service quality at the Licensing Service Centres within the City of Tshwane Municipality".

You have been selected to participate in this survey because you have just experienced the service at the LSC. The purpose of this survey is to determine consumer perceptions of service quality at the Licensing Service Centres within the City of Tshwane municipality.

Please note the following:

- Your participation is important to us. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the survey at any time without any explanation or penalty.
- This is an anonymous and confidential survey therefore you will not be identified; the researcher is interested in your personal opinion regarding the subject matter.
- You will not be reimbursed or receive any incentives for participating in this survey. However, we hope that the information received from this survey will help in determining the consumer perceptions of service quality at the LSCs.
- The information you give will be used only for academic research purposes and the findings of the study will be published in Unisa institutional repository and in academic journals.
- The records of the data will be kept for five years for publication purposes on a password protected computer. After the five years period, all information will be permanently deleted.

- The research study has received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Economics and Management Sciences at UNISA.

Should you have any questions relating to this survey, please e-mail the researcher: Ms. P.C. Hlaka at pebetsi.cleo@gmail.com or my research supervisor, Mrs. L.L. Manley at manlell@unisa.ac.za or my co-research supervisor, Mr. R. Machado at machar@unisa.ac.za.

Please sign to indicate that:

- You have read and understood the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

----------------------------   --------------------------------

Respondent's signature   **Date**

APPENDIX D:
STUDY QUESTIONNAIRE

UNISA university of south africa

Respondent number__________

CONSUMER PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY AT THE LICENSING SERVICE CENTRES WITHIN THE CITY OF TSHWANE MUNICIPALITY

Dear respondent

Thank you for your time and willingness to participate in this survey. The purpose of this study is to determine the consumer perceptions of service quality at the Licensing Service Centres (LSCs) within the City of Tshwane municipality. The survey should not take more than **15 minutes** to complete. This is an anonymous and confidential survey, therefore, you will not be identified. Furthermore, the answers you provide will be used only for academic research purposes.

Please answer each question by marking a cross (X) in the appropriate block.

Please take note that there are no correct or incorrect answers.

Q1. Have you received service from any of the following LSCs?

- Waltloo
- Centurion
- Akasia

Yes	1	→ If yes, please continue with the survey.
No	2	→ If no, please do not continue further with the survey.

Q2. Are you between the age of 18 and 65 years?

Yes	1	→ If yes, please continue with the survey.
No	2	→ If no, please do not continue further with the survey.

SECTION A: PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

Q3. Please indicate which LSC you have **just** visited to get a service**.**

Waltloo	1
Centurion	2
Akasia	3

Q4. Please indicate the main reason why you visited this LSC?

Registration and licence of motor vehicle	1
Deregistration of motor vehicle	2
Motor vehicle clearance test	3
Application of learner licence test	4
Application and renewal of drivers' licence	5
Professional Driving Permit (PrDP) application and renewal	6
Other	7

If "other" was selected, please specify:

___

___

___

Q5. The following set of statements relate to the perceptions of service quality about the LSC you have visited. For each statement, please indicate the extent to which you believe the LSC has the feature described by the statement. Please cross the number you feel is most appropriate, 1 means that you strongly disagree and 5 means you strongly agree.

Dimensions		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
Tangibility						
5.1	The LSC has modern looking equipment	1	2	3	4	5
5.2	The physical facilities in the LSC are visually appealing	1	2	3	4	5
5.3	The LSC staff are neat and have professional appearance	1	2	3	4	5
5.4	Material at the LSC that are associated with the service such as signage, statements etc. are visually appealing	1	2	3	4	5
Reliability						
5.5	When the LSC staff promise to deliver the appropriate service, they keep that promise	1	2	3	4	5
5.6	When consumers have a problem, the staff at the LSC show sincere interest in resolving the matter	1	2	3	4	5
5.7	The LSC staff perform the services right the first time	1	2	3	4	5
5.8	The staff at the LSC deliver the service at the promised time	1	2	3	4	5
5.9	The LSC maintain error-free records	1	2	3	4	5
Responsiveness						
5.10	The LSC staff inform consumers when the service will be performed	1	2	3	4	5
5.11	The staff at the LSC provide consumers with prompt service	1	2	3	4	5

Dimensions		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree
5.12	The staff at the LSC are always willing to listen and help consumers	1	2	3	4	5
5.13	The LSC staff are always ready to respond to consumer's requests	1	2	3	4	5
Assurance						
5.14	The behaviour of the LSC staff instil confidence in consumers	1	2	3	4	5
5.15	The staff at the LSC are consistently polite and respectful to me	1	2	3	4	5
5.16	The LSC staff have knowledge to answer consumer's questions	1	2	3	4	5
5.17	The staff make consumers feel safe when performing their transactions at the LSC	1	2	3	4	5
Empathy						
5.18	The LSC staff give consumers individual attention	1	2	3	4	5
5.19	The LSC staff are sympathetic and care about the consumer's needs	1	2	3	4	5
5.20	The staff at the LSC have the consumer's best interest at heart	1	2	3	4	5
5.21	The LSC staff understand the specific needs of their consumers	1	2	3	4	5
5.22	The LSC operating hours are convenient to the consumers	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION B: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please answer each question by marking a cross (X) in the appropriate block.

Q6. Please identify yourself in terms of gender group.

Male	1
Female	2
I prefer not to say	3

Q7. What is your age group?

18-30	1
31-40	2
41-50	3
51-65	4

Q8. Please identify yourself in terms of racial group

White	1
African	2
Coloured	3
Asian	4
Other	5

If "other" was selected, please specify:

____

Q9. What is your highest education qualification?

Matriculation	1
Diploma/ Degree	2
Post graduate degree	3
Other	4

If "other" was selected, please specify

____

Q10. Please indicate your occupation

Student	1
Employed	2
Self-employed	3
Unemployed	4
Other	5

If “other” was selected, please specify:

____

Thank you for your time and participation.

Should you have any questions relating to this survey, please email the researcher: Ms. P.C. Hlaka at pebetsi.cleo@gmail.com.

APPENDIX E:
CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

UNISA

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Research Title: Consumer perceptions of service quality at the Licensing Service Centres within the City of Tshwane municipality.

CONFIDENTIALITY CLAUSE

The research code of ethics mandates that confidentiality should be maintained throughout data collection, data analysis and report writing.

As a Statistician I understand that I have access to confidential information. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of this responsibility and agree to the following:

- I understand that all information obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to disclose or divulge to unauthorised persons any of this information, unless specifically authorised to do so.
- I understand that names and any other identifying information about study sites and participants are completely confidential.
- I agree to use the data solely for the purpose stipulated by the client.
- I agree to shred any hard copies of data in my possession on completion of transcribing project. All electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of my computer upon completion of this task.

Name of Statistician: Andries Masenya

Signature of the Statistician: ____________ Date: 18.03.2018

APPENDIX F:
DECLARATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDIT

Retha Burger
B.A.(H.E.D.)
tel : 012 807 3864 fax : 012 807 3864
cell : 083 653 5255 e-mail : retha@skillnet.co.za
Independent Skills Development Facilitator

Dear Ms Hlaka

This letter is to record that I have completed a language edit of your MCom dissertation entitled, "Consumer perceptions of service quality at Licensing Service Centres within the City of Tshwane Municipality".

The edit that I carried out included the following:

-Spelling	-Grammar
-Vocabulary	-Punctuation
-Pronoun matches	-Word usage
-Sentence structure	-Correct acronyms (matching your supplied list)

-Captions and labels for figures and tables
-Spot checking of 10 references

The edit that I carried out excluded the following:

-Content
-Correctness or truth of information (unless obvious)
-Correctness/spelling of specific technical terms and words (unless obvious)
-Correctness/spelling of unfamiliar names and proper nouns (unless obvious)
-Correctness of specific formulae or symbols, or illustrations.

Yours sincerely

Retha Burger

28 July 2020

APPENDIX G:
ORIGINALITY REPORT

Submission Info	
SUBMISSION ID	1366688626
SUBMISSION DATE	18-Aug-2020 08:13PM
SUBMISSION COUNT	3
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FILE SIZE	2.51M
CHARACTER COUNT	231896
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ORIGINALITY	
OVERALL	14%
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STUDENT PAPERS	N/A

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