

# Justice Perceptions as Predictors of Customer Satisfaction: The Impact of Distributive, Procedural, and Interactional Justice<sup>1</sup>

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This article attempts to extend prior research by testing the effects of justice components (distributive, procedural, and interactional) on customer satisfaction beyond the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm. To this end, two separate field survey studies were conducted. A total of 568 customers were surveyed in 38 hotels and 40 restaurants. The results showed that distributive justice was critical in predicting customer satisfaction, while the influence of procedural and interactional justice was secondary. Justice concepts were also robust against the simultaneous inclusion of disconfirmation and performance in the satisfaction equation. The article concludes with theoretical and managerial implications, as well as opportunities for future research.

The customer who is satisfied with a product or service is more likely to repeat the purchase and to recommend the consumption experience to other persons. For this reason, academics and practitioners have emphasized the concept of *customer satisfaction*, defined as the favorability of the individual's subjective evaluations of the outcomes and experiences associated with his or her consumption activities (Hunt, 1977; Westbrook, 1980). In the

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competitive environments of Western societies, investing in customer satisfaction is a means of creating a sustainable advantage, given that it serves to link processes culminating in purchase and consumption with important post-purchase phenomena, such as loyalty (Bolton, 1998; Olsen, 2002) and word of mouth (Swan & Oliver, 1989).

Researchers have investigated the processes through which customers arrive at satisfaction/dissatisfaction judgments. The expectancy disconfirmation paradigm plays a prevailing role (Anderson, 1973; Devlin, Gwynne, & Ennew, 2002; Oliver, 1980, 1981, 1993; Rust & Oliver, 2000; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996). It assumes a conscious processing of information in which customers compare their prior expectations of product outcomes to those actually obtained from the product.

Different dimensions of perceived justice also have been proposed as direct determinants of customer satisfaction (Clemmer & Schneider, 1996). Customers expect consumption experiences to be fair, and they engage in negative reactions when they believe that they have been subjected to unjust outcomes or procedures. The affected customers may experience dissatisfaction and elicit a desire to switch providers. Thus, individuals have a justice motive and judge their relationships with institutions and salespersons using fairness as a fundamental base. Perceived justice is thought to be an additional factor in the satisfaction response that is not reflected in the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver & Swan, 1989a, 1989b).

Previous research has focused primarily on the role of different facets of justice in the understanding of customer reactions to failures and organizational recovery efforts (e.g., Blodgett, Hill, & Tax, 1997; Conlon & Murray, 1996; Goodwin & Ross, 1989; Smith, Bolton, & Wagner, 1999). Nevertheless, justice perceptions also are involved in overall customer satisfaction (see Clemmer & Schneider, 1996). Customers are able to evaluate the justice of outcomes and procedures related to the purchase of products and services, even without the existence of failures, customer complaints, and recovery efforts. Justice perceptions are always present in consumption experiences, beyond the very small percentage of customers who complain (see Richins & Verhage, 1985; Swan & Oliver, 1989).

Although the influential research by Oliver and Swan (1989a, 1989b) facilitated the introduction of the justice framework into the investigation of customer satisfaction with products and services, little is known about the relative impact of the different justice dimensions beyond the well-established expectancy disconfirmation paradigm. Prior work explored the joint influence of perceived justice and the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm on satisfaction, showing that both processes coexist as separate significant antecedents of customer satisfaction (Oliver & Swan, 1989a, 1989b; Pathak, Kucukarslan, & Segal, 1994; Patterson, Johnson, & Spreng, 1997).

These efforts, however, were limited. Some studies focused only on the distributive component of justice (Oliver & Swan, 1989a, 1989b). Others did not distinguish between the different dimensions of justice (Pathak et al., 1994; Patterson et al., 1997). Nevertheless, the distinction between distributive justice on the one hand and procedural and interactional justice on the other hand is particularly relevant because it reflects the existence of two traditions in the study of justice (Cropanzano, Rupp, Mohler, & Schminke, 2001). The first (distributive) is more outcome oriented, while the second (procedural and interactional) is more relationship oriented.

Despite the fact that consideration of these different dimensions of justice provides a richer portrait of the relationships between justice and customer satisfaction, there is a lack of empirical studies on the topic. An exception is the research carried out by Clemmer and Schneider (1996). Considering distributive, procedural, and interactional justice, these authors obtained significant relationships between these different dimensions of justice and customer satisfaction. Their findings were not congruent with the dominant relationship marketing framework, given that the results supported the predominance of distributive justice (outcome oriented) over procedural and interactional justice (relationship oriented).

As we shall see, this unexpected result could be motivated by the fact that Clemmer and Schneider (1996) did not control for the impact of the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm in their study. With this in mind, the present investigation aims to extend this effort by controlling for the impact of disconfirmation of expectations and performance perceptions (expectancy disconfirmation paradigm) and by assessing whether or not justice dimensions make a significant contribution beyond these controls. Thus, this extension serves to test more accurately the relative impact of justice dimensions on customer satisfaction.

## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

### *Distributive Justice: An Outcome-Oriented Approach*

Based on the work carried out by Adams (1965), researchers traditionally have focused on distributive justice in order to predict customer satisfaction (Huppertz, Arenson, & Evans, 1978; Lapidus & Pinkerton, 1995). Theories of distributive justice argue that perceptions of justice result from customer evaluations of outcome fairness. In purchase transactions, customers invest inputs (e.g., money) and receive outcomes (e.g., service quality). Also, customers compare their own outputs and inputs to the outputs and inputs

of the other party in an exchange (Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988). The customer expects reciprocity in terms of tangible matters (e.g., relating quality to price), and the degree to which he or she perceives the exchange as inequitable determines negative post-transaction affect. This form of negative affect is usually interpreted as dissatisfaction (Oliver & Swan, 1989b).

Distributive justice is based on equity theory, given that this framework aims to understand how individuals respond to outcome distribution. Equity theory has been a tremendously influential model in different research areas, including customer satisfaction. In fact, for a long time, the concept of justice in the study of customer satisfaction has been considered synonymous with equity theory (Oliver & Swan, 1989a, 1989b). Adams' (1965) equity theory is described as a classical social exchange theory, which assumes that humans are motivated instrumentally in their relationships with others (Cropanzano et al., 2001).

With respect to the distribution of outcomes, individuals seek to maximize gains and minimize losses. Interpersonal aspects are relatively neglected in equity theory because they are conceptualized only in outcome-oriented terms. In contrast, a more relationship-centered approach to social exchange is present in the concepts of procedural and interactional justice.

#### *Procedural and Interactional Justice: A Relationship-Oriented Approach*

Ten years after Adams' (1965) study, Thibaut and Walker (1975) identified a second dimension of perceived justice, labeled *procedural justice*, which involves the process used to arrive at the outcome. Research in consumer behavior has confirmed that customers define fairness not only by considering the outcomes received, but also in terms of *procedural justice*, which is defined as the perceived fairness of the means by which the ends are accomplished (Goodwin & Ross, 1989; Smith et al., 1999).

While procedural justice is a complex concept, there are focal issues (e.g., accessibility, speed) that are particularly relevant in service businesses (Blodgett et al., 1997; Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998). In service encounters, contact employees should provide products and resolve conflicts in a correct and functional manner. The perceived unfairness of waiting too long in service situations (Katz, Larson, & Larson, 1991) and lack of accessibility of contact employees (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990) can result in customer dissatisfaction.

Although research has been focused primarily on the aforementioned dimensions of distributive and procedural justice, individuals use a third basis for judging fairness: interactional justice (Bies & Moag, 1986). In

service encounters, *interactional justice* refers to the fairness of the interpersonal treatment customers receive during the consumption experience (Blodgett et al., 1997). While procedural justice focuses on process issues that are functional and not interpersonal in nature (e.g., timing/speed, accessibility), interactional justice refers to the more interpersonal issues of procedures (e.g., politeness, empathy; Clemmer & Schneider, 1996; Tax et al., 1998). The literature shows the central role of interactional justice in customer evaluations and behaviors (Blodgett et al., 1997; Goodwin & Ross, 1989; Hocutt, Chakraborty, & Mowen, 1997).

Both procedural and interactional justice are linked directly to contemporary social exchange theories (Cropanzano et al., 2001). Assuming that humans are social animals, theorists argue that in social exchanges, subjects not only consider the economic importance of outcomes, but also their socioemotional value. This socioemotional value focuses on the quality of the relationships among individuals, including aspects such as the status and dignity people perceive. Current thinking on social exchange considers procedural and interactional justice as particularly relevant (Cropanzano et al., 2001), emphasizing the role of relationships in social exchange. In contrast, distributive justice has been given less attention (e.g., Masteron, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000). This trend is also present in the study of service management and customer satisfaction, as it reflects the predominance of the relationship marketing approach (see Grönroos, 1994).

### *Relative Importance of Justice Dimensions*

As we argued previously, theory and research distinguish between three dimensions of perceived justice: distributive justice (perceived fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (perception that fair procedures were used to arrive at outcomes), and interactional justice (perceived fairness of interpersonal treatment). This differentiation is well established, not only in the study of consumer behavior, but also in other research areas such as organizational justice (e.g., Beugré & Baron, 2001). In addition, Clemmer and Schneider (1996) reported that not all justice dimensions have the same importance in predicting customer satisfaction. They observed, in four different kinds of services (banks, physicians, fast-food, and restaurants), that distributive justice was the most important predictor of customer satisfaction, followed by procedural justice and, finally, interactional justice.

The results Clemmer and Schneider's (1996) work were relatively surprising. As we discussed previously, distributive justice reflects a more outcome-oriented and instrumental evaluation, given that a satisfactory outcome-to-input ratio is desired. In contrast, procedural and interactional

justice are more relationship oriented, reflecting the functional and interpersonal manner in which contact employees provide the service.

As Clemmer and Schneider (1996) pointed out, their findings did not confirm the dominant role of relationship marketing in service management because social aspects underlying procedural and interactional justice were secondary. Relationship marketing assumes that social interaction is critical in creating satisfied customers (e.g., Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Grönroos, 1994; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Price & Arnould, 1999). Employees are frequently the primary contact point for the customer; therefore, it is argued that employees are responsible for the quality of the service offered to customers (e.g., Bowen & Schneider, 1985; Bradley & Sparks, 2000; Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). However, Clemmer and Schneider observed that service outcomes associated with distributive justice were the most critical factors in predicting customer satisfaction, while the influence of the interpersonal issues included in procedural and interactional justice was secondary. Thus, Clemmer and Schneider raised the possibility that procedural and interactional justice are subordinate to distributive justice.

Generally speaking, the literature is not consistent with regard to the relative impact of justice concepts on customer satisfaction. From the dominant relationship marketing approach, it is suggested that procedural and interactional justice should be relevant. However, the few empirical results that exist support the predominance of distributive justice. Thus, because not enough effort has been devoted to the study of the relative influence of justice concepts on customer satisfaction, and because the literature is somewhat inconsistent, there is a need to test the predictive power of the justice dimensions more accurately. To this end, the present paper assesses the specific contribution of justice dimensions, while controlling for the impact of the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm.

From the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm, two principal constructs have emerged as significant and robust direct predictors of customer satisfaction in different types of products and situations: disconfirmation of expectations (e.g., Bearden & Teel, 1983; LaBarbera & Mazursky, 1983; Oliver, 1980; Oliver & DeSarbo, 1988; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996) and perceived performance (e.g., Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Patterson, 1993; Patterson et al., 1997; Van Montfort, Masurel, & Van Rijn, 2000). *Disconfirmation of expectations* refers to the degree to which outcomes meet or do not meet intrapersonal customer expectations, while *performance* is based on the absolute level of perceived outcomes taken alone.

Controlling for the impact of disconfirmation and performance is necessary not only because these constructs are central in predicting customer satisfaction, but also because they tend to be correlated significantly with justice (see Patterson et al., 1997). As Clemmer and Schneider (1996) did not

consider the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm, their results could be explained by the links of justice with disconfirmation and performance, and not by the specific contribution of justice dimensions. This is particularly relevant with regard to distributive justice. The predominance of this justice component in Clemmer and Schneider's research could be a result of the fact that, although they are conceptually distinct, distributive justice, disconfirmation of expectations, and performance refer to outcome-oriented evaluations. The predictive power of distributive justice may be inflated artificially because this justice dimension shares variance with disconfirmation and performance.

In short, the purpose of the present paper is to extend previous research efforts by testing the relative importance of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice in predicting customer satisfaction beyond the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm. Because some empirical findings have been inconsistent with the relationship marketing framework, this extension makes it possible to assess, more accurately, whether or not the relationship marketing prediction with regard to justice (i.e., procedural and interactional justice predominate over distributive justice) is confirmed. To achieve this goal, the following hypotheses are formulated for examination in this study:

*Hypothesis 1.* Distributive, procedural, and interactional justice dimensions will differ in their predictive power of customer satisfaction.

*Hypothesis 2.* Justice dimensions will predict an additional and significant satisfaction variance beyond the predictive power of the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm.

## Method

### *Sample and Procedure*

A total of 38 hotels and 40 restaurants that are located on the Spanish Mediterranean coast participated in this study. We surveyed separate samples for the two usage situations (hotel vs. restaurant). These hotels and restaurants were selected in order to provide representation from the two main Spanish hospitality industry models: "sun-and-sand" (57.9% of the hotels; 50.0% of the restaurants) and "conference" (42.1% of the hotels; 50% of the restaurants). They primarily served customers who were seeking recreation in the sun-and-sand facilities, or customers who were on business trips in the conference facilities.

Data were collected at the service sites (real-time satisfaction approach) in order to avoid the effects of post hoc satisfaction approaches (Stewart & Hull, 1992). The *real-time satisfaction approach* is associated with an assessment that occurs during an on-site experience and reflects a direct evaluation of the focal service. In contrast, the *post hoc satisfaction approach* is associated with an assessment that occurs sometime after the on-site experience and also can reflect the customer experience with different service providers. Because this study focuses on the prediction of customer satisfaction with the focal service, and because focal service information is useful for efforts related to management, design, or policy (Stewart & Hull, 1992), a real-time satisfaction approach was required.

The initial contact with each service organization occurred via telephone. Researchers made an appointment with the manager and requested permission to interview a small group of customers at the service site. Consistent with the real-time satisfaction approach, the sampling procedure was designed to select customers who had some recent experience with the hotel or restaurant in which they were located.

The cooperation of hotel customers was requested, taking advantage of the moment they were using the reception service. In order to be eligible to be surveyed, the customer had to have spent at least one night in the hotel in question. The sampling was carried out at different moments of the day when customers were present at the hotels, excluding the nighttime period. For restaurants, the researchers requested the cooperation of customers immediately after their consumption experience (lunch or dinner) with the focal restaurant.

The sampling plan resulted in 568 usable participant surveys for this study: 275 for hotel customers and 293 for restaurant customers. Largely because of the use of a real-time approach, the response rate was high (about 90%). Participants answered the questionnaire voluntarily and anonymously. The two samples differed somewhat in terms of demographic characteristics. For the customers surveyed at the hotels, the typical respondent was a man (59%), between 31 and 40 years old (29%), married (57%), and university educated (53%). For the restaurants, the typical respondent was a man (52%), between 20 and 30 years old (43%), unmarried (55%), and university educated (63%).

### *Measures*

The measures included disconfirmation and performance concepts, a scale containing the three justice dimensions, and a satisfaction instrument. A total of three items were used to measure each concept. The questionnaire



was pretested with 11 subjects, who indicated that the survey instrument was not difficult to complete.

*Control variables.* Disconfirmation of expectations was measured by using a scale based on problems, benefits, and overall disconfirmation (Oliver, 1980; Oliver & Swan, 1989a, 1989b). We used three items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*): “The problems in this hotel/restaurant were fewer than I expected,” “The benefits in this hotel/restaurant were better than I expected,” and “The quality in this hotel/restaurant was better than I expected.” An overall measure of perceived performance was obtained by asking, “Overall, what is the level of quality you received from this hotel/restaurant?” Following this stem, there were three 7-point scales anchored by *very low/very high*, *awful/excellent*, and *very poor/very good*. Similar measures of perceived performance can be found in the customer satisfaction literature (Spreng & Mackoy, 1996).

*Justice perceptions.* Distributive justice was measured on a scale that assesses the degree to which outcomes are perceived to be related to inputs (Tata & Bowes-Sperry, 1996). We used the following items: “The quality of this hotel/restaurant is good, given the price,” “The services and the facilities of this hotel/restaurant correspond to the price,” and “The price of this hotel/restaurant is appropriate, given the quality.”

We used three reverse-scored items to measure procedural justice, reflecting waiting time and accessibility of employees (Blodgett et al., 1997): “I waited a long time to be attended to,” “I felt frustrated because employees did not respond to my requests for service,” and “I had to try too hard to get employees’ attention.” Interactional justice was measured using a three-item scale that assesses how much employees provided customers with caring and individual attention (Hocutt et al., 1997): “The employees of this hotel/restaurant understand the needs of each customer,” “The employees of this hotel/restaurant provided personal attention,” and “The employees of this hotel/restaurant were very involved in taking care of customers.” All of the items relating to justice perceptions were measured on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*).

*Customer satisfaction.* Customer satisfaction was measured by using a scale that assesses satisfaction and feelings about the choice of the hotel/restaurant (Mano & Oliver, 1993; Oliver, 1980). We used three items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*): “I feel happy about my decision concerning the choice of this hotel/restaurant,” “I believe I did the right thing when I used this hotel/restaurant,” and “In the future, I will be happy to come to this hotel/restaurant.”

In all cases, scores were the averages of the items. Higher scores indicate greater positive disconfirmation, greater perceived performance, greater justice, and greater customer satisfaction.

*Analysis*

Because predictors measured in this study were interrelated, correlations and regression weights can carry redundant and misleading information in assessing the importance of variables in predicting customer satisfaction. For each predictor, correlations reflect not only variance shared with customer satisfaction, but also variance shared with other predictors. In addition, regression weights can be misleading because there are suppressor variables.

Some predictors can be heavily weighted, not because they predict customer satisfaction directly, but because they suppress irrelevant variance in other predictors. It is for these reasons that squared semipartial correlations were used to test Hypothesis 1. This statistic represents the amount by which  $R^2$  would be reduced if a predictor were not included in the regression equation. That is, squared semipartial correlations express the unique contribution of each predictor to  $R^2$ . In addition,  $F$  tests of statistical significance were used to assess the change in  $R^2$  resulting from the unique contribution of each predictor to the predictability of customer satisfaction (Jaccard, Turrisi, & Wan, 1990). A total of five predictors were included jointly in the regression model: disconfirmation, performance, and justice concepts (distributive, procedural, and interactional).

Hypothesis 2 was tested by performing hierarchical multiple regression tests (Taylor & Baker, 1994). This procedure allows us to estimate the specific contribution of justice dimensions to the predictability of customer satisfaction. First, we entered the effects of control variables (disconfirmation of expectations and performance) into the satisfaction equation (Step 1). Second, justice dimensions were entered also into the regression model (Step 2). The  $F$  test of statistical significance was used to assess the change in  $R^2$  resulting from the inclusion of justice dimensions in the satisfaction equation.

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, internal consistency reliabilities, and Pearson correlations among the variables of this study. Table 2 shows squared semipartial correlations between each predictor and customer satisfaction. Finally, Table 3 presents the results of hierarchical multiple regression tests.

Evidence related to Hypothesis 1 appears in Table 2. For the two usage situations, all justice dimensions contributed significantly to customer satisfaction. However, as hypothesized, they did not have the same predictive

Table 1

*Correlation Matrix*

Variable	Hotels		Restaurants		1		2		3		4		5		6		
	M	SD	M	SD	H	R	H	R	H	R	H	R	H	R	H	R	
1. Satisfaction	5.97	1.09	5.63	1.23	.80	.80	–	–									
2. Disconfirmation	4.89	1.36	4.89	1.43	.50	.54	.80	.90	–	–							
3. Performance	5.53	1.09	5.50	1.06	.58	.78	.37	.50	.91	.97	–	–					
4. Distributive	5.77	1.22	5.62	1.19	.74	.77	.48	.40	.52	.66	.96	.91	–	–			
5. Procedural	6.14	1.32	6.00	1.23	.25	.38	.10	.16	.11	.32	.19	.34	.80	.80	–	–	
6. Interactional	5.31	1.17	5.18	1.30	.51	.66	.32	.45	.38	.60	.46	.54	.21	.30	.88	.91	

*Note.* H = hotels, R = restaurants. Internal consistency reliabilities are presented along the diagonal. All correlation coefficients greater than .11 are significant ( $p < .01$ ). Coefficients less than .12 are not significant.

power. The unique contribution of distributive justice to customer satisfaction variance was greater than that of interactional justice. In addition, squared semipartial correlations associated with interactional justice were greater than those of procedural justice. Also, disconfirmation of expecta-

Table 2

*Squared Semipartial Correlations Between Predictors and Customer Satisfaction*

Predictor	Coefficients		F tests	
	Hotels	Restaurants	Hotels	Restaurants
Disconfirmation	.013	.012	10.00**	15.00**
Performance	.032	.050	24.62**	62.50**
Distributive	.129	.084	99.23**	105.00**
Procedural	.007	.004	5.38*	5.00*
Interactional	.017	.017	13.08**	21.25**

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

*Note.* *dfs* for the *F* tests corresponding to hotel squared semipartial correlations are (1,269). *dfs* for the *F* tests corresponding to restaurant squared semipartial correlations are (1,287).

Table 3

*Hierarchical Regressions for Prediction of Customer Satisfaction*

Predictor	Hotels			Restaurants		
	$\beta$	<i>SE</i> $\beta$	$R^2$	$\beta$	<i>SE</i> $\beta$	$R^2$
Step 1						
Disconfirmation	.14**	.03		.13**	.03	
Performance	.22**	.04	.43	.33**	.05	.63
Step 2						
Distributive	.48**	.04		.39**	.04	
Procedural	.09*	.03		.07*	.03	
Interactional	.16**	.04	.65	.17**	.04	.76

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

tions and performance (control variables) contributed significantly to customer satisfaction, as it is well established in the literature.

The results also support Hypothesis 2 (Table 3). For hotel customers, justice dimensions added a significant 22% of customer satisfaction variance to the predictive power of disconfirmation of expectations and perceived performance,  $F(3, 269) = 56.15$ ,  $p < .01$ . For restaurant customers, the incremental 13% of variance explained by justice dimensions was also significant,  $F(3, 287) = 51.81$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### Discussion

The present article aimed to test the contribution of justice perceptions to the predictability of customer satisfaction beyond the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm. The results that were obtained led to two interesting observations. First, the data indicate that not all justice components had the same importance in predicting customer satisfaction. Distributive justice was the most important determinant of customer satisfaction, followed by interactional justice and, finally, by procedural justice. Second, the results show that justice dimensions predicted an additional and significant satisfaction variance beyond the predictive power of disconfirmation and performance. These two findings lead to theoretical, managerial, and research implications.

*Theoretical Implications*

The literature is somewhat contradictory with respect to the relative impact of justice concepts on customer satisfaction. The prevailing relationship marketing approach suggests that procedural and interactional justice should play a prominent role. However, some previous empirical results have shown the predominance of distributive justice (Clemmer & Schneider, 1996). Our findings, like those obtained by Clemmer and Schneider, are not congruent with the deemphasis of distributive justice and the dominant role of relationship marketing extant in the literature (see Crosby et al., 1990; Grönroos, 1994; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Price & Arnould, 1999). In fact, the data indicate that distributive justice was the most critical factor in predicting customer satisfaction. Thus, the present findings show that customer satisfaction was based primarily on the degree to which the exchange was perceived as equitable in terms of tangible matters.

In contrast, the more interpersonal issues involved in procedural and interactional justice played a secondary role, compared to the one played by distributive justice. As we indicated previously, the predominant role of distributive justice that Clemmer and Schneider (1996) observed in their research could be attributable to the fact that justice shared variance with disconfirmation of expectations and performance. Nevertheless, in the present investigation, we controlled for the impact of these constructs, and distributive justice continued to be a strong and robust predictor of customer satisfaction.

The relationship marketing approach accentuates the social interaction between contact employees and clients in creating customer satisfaction. The popularity of this approach reflects a general trend in contemporary social exchange theory to emphasize procedural and interactional justice (see Cropanzano et al., 2001). However, our data indicate that the role of these two justice concepts may be overestimated in the literature, at least with regard to the prediction of customer satisfaction. In fact, the present investigation encourages a recovery of the classical equity approach, which indicates that the process by which customers compare costs and benefits is critical in understanding customer satisfaction. Thus, the present investigation advises against a premature deemphasis of distributive justice.

A tentative explanation of the predominance of distributive justice in predicting customer satisfaction can be related to the peculiarities of consumption experiences in service encounters. As we indicated previously, distributive justice is based on equity theory. This classical social exchange theory assumes that humans are motivated to maximize their gains and minimize their costs in social relationships.

The instrumental evaluation underlying distributive justice probably plays a prevailing role in numerous consumption experiences, given the lack of socioemotional involvement that usually characterizes the relationships between employees and customers. For instance, in a typical service encounter in hotels and restaurants, it is difficult to initiate and maintain socioemotional bonds between contact employees and customers because the duration of the relationship is brief. Current thinking on social exchange focuses on the socioemotional value of social interaction, but consumption experiences may offer few opportunities to develop relationships beyond a mere exchange. Given this situation, the comparison between costs and benefits may be salient for customers, while social interaction is probably more secondary. Only when the duration of the relationship increases can procedural and interactional justice acquire a greater predictive power.

Another tentative explanation for the prominent role of distributive justice could be related to the level of abstraction of measures. As in the case of disconfirmation and performance, distributive justice was measured at a high level of abstraction (e.g., “The quality of this hotel/restaurant is good, given the price”). In contrast, procedural and interactional justice were measured at a much more concrete level (e.g., “The employees of this hotel/restaurant provided personal attention”). Because customer satisfaction was measured at a high level of abstraction, the strong relationship of distributive justice with customer satisfaction may be a result of the fact that these two constructs were measured with similar levels of abstraction.

### *Managerial Implications*

Together, our results indicate that the justice framework can be used to propose strategies devoted to increasing customer satisfaction. In addition to performance and the traditional control of customer expectations—hence, disconfirmation (e.g., advertising, sales promotion)—justice perceptions should be taken into account. More specifically, managers should be aware that distributive justice is a strong predictor of customer satisfaction. Thus, customers should feel they receive a fair level of tangible outcomes when they use a service (e.g., offering additional benefits to customers, competitive costs of services). As Clemmer and Schneider (1996) pointed out, recovering the key role of distributive fairness is especially important in an era when, on the contrary, service management is focused primarily on relationship marketing.

In spite of the predominance of distributive justice, procedural and interactional justice should be considered also. Managers should be aware of the ways in which employees can be empowered to treat customers

adequately in functional and interpersonal terms. Specific training and compensation policies, as well as job descriptions, could help to deliver excellent service from a procedural and interactional justice perspective.

### *Opportunities for Future Research*

The present findings have several implications for future research, some of which are related to the limitations of this study. Research is necessary to investigate more complex models, including the different dimensions of justice. In the present case, we focused only on the direct effects of justice concepts on customer satisfaction. However, interrelations among these predictors, as well as indirect antecedents of customer satisfaction, could be analyzed by using structural equation modeling.

The investigation of customer satisfaction would be enriched if additional models devoted to the integration of the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm and the justice framework were tested. Because previous integration efforts have considered only an overall measure of justice (e.g., Oliver & Swan, 1989a, 1989b; Patterson et al., 1997), these new efforts will require the measurement of the three justice dimensions. Also, customer expectations about products or services could be considered in these models.

In the present investigation, we excluded customer expectations because research has found that they have a secondary role in the prediction of customer satisfaction. Although some significant effects have been obtained (Bearden & Teel, 1983; Churchill & Surprenant, 1982; Oliver, 1980), there is growing empirical evidence indicating that customer expectations play only an indirect role in the formation of customer satisfaction (e.g., Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Marzo, Martínez-Tur, Ramos, & Peiró, 2002; Patterson et al., 1997; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996). Nevertheless, even if customer expectations merit only an indirect role, that role should be articulated carefully in complex models that explore the joint influence of the expectancy disconfirmation paradigm and the three justice concepts.

The generalizability of our results is somewhat limited because the investigation was concentrated in hotels and restaurants in a specific geographical area (i.e., Spanish Mediterranean coast). Also, the hotels and the restaurants mainly served customers from two segments (i.e., sun-and-sand, and conference). Therefore, the findings could be specific to these types of service businesses and customers.

Thus, investigators are urged also to replicate this research in other service industries and using additional segments or subgroups of clients. For instance, there is a need to extend the present investigation to more interactive services. In hotels and restaurants, customer evaluations can be based,

to a large extent, on tangible attributes (e.g., bathroom cleanliness). In contrast, there are services in which customers have a more limited vision of tangible matters (e.g., financial services), and their evaluations could be based on the social aspects of services. Also, there are services (e.g., therapeutic) in which the emotional content of the relationship between contact employee and customer is greater than in hotels and restaurants. In these services, procedural and interactional justice may be related more closely to customer satisfaction. Extending the present hypotheses to more interactive services could improve the understanding of customer satisfaction.

Another limitation of this study is related to the measures that were used. Our data are taken from a single type of measure (self-report measure), so that one can expect somewhat inflated relationships among variables. In fact, some strong correlations between performance and justice were observed. It is not a fatal flaw in this study because we controlled for the impact of shared variance using squared semipartial correlations. Nevertheless, we recommend that future research include complementary types of measures (e.g., objective measures of performance) in order to discriminate better between performance and justice. Also, it would be advisable to design additional measures of justice concepts with more similar levels of abstraction–concreteness, as they could make a significant contribution to the customer satisfaction literature.

Finally, there is a need to conduct longitudinal research. The process by which customers create their justice judgments is adjusted over time. This dynamic could be studied by using longitudinal approaches in which the relationships between customers and service providers could be followed.

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