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ROLE OF TRUST AND VALUE CREATION IN PUBLIC GOVERNANCE VIA LENSES OF PUBLIC VALUE THEORY**Aaram Gwiza***Department of Auditing, University of South Africa, South Africa**E-mail: gwizaa@unisa.ac.za**Received 18 February 2026; accepted 9 May 2026; published 30 June 2026*

Abstract. Public trust and value creation in government have declined across many countries due to governance failures, corruption, limited transparency, and growing citizen expectations. This has prompted renewed interest in governance frameworks that emphasise trust and value creation within public institutions. This study explores the role of trust and value in public governance through the lens of Public Value Theory (PVT) in contemporary Africa. The paper examines how governments can move beyond traditional bureaucratic and market-driven models toward newer theories, such as PVT, that prioritise trust and value creation, responsiveness, accountability, and citizen engagement. Through a conceptual and analytical review of existing literature, the study assesses the relevance of PVT in describing the trust and value deficit between governments and citizens. It argues that aligning public institutions' policies, services, and decision-making processes with societal values and collective interests can enhance legitimacy and rebuild public confidence. The study further highlights key governance practices—such as participatory decision-making, transparency, and collaborative governance—that support the generation of public value and confidence in government. The paper concludes that Public Value Theory provides a promising framework for contemporary governance reforms aimed at restoring trust and strengthening the relationship between governments and citizens in increasingly complex and demanding democratic environments.

Keywords: good governance; public administration and governance; public confidence; public trust; public value

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, contemporary governments are experiencing significant challenges related to the global economic recession, endemic corruption, technological revolution, natural disasters, pandemics, and ethnic and civil wars, which are diminishing citizens' trust in public goods and service delivery to a greater extent (Ivančík & Dušek, 2026). Recent studies suggest the greatest decline in citizens' trust in governments and public organisations, owing largely to governments' failure to meet the values and expectations of electorates (OECD, 2019; Katelo, Kokina & Rašćevskis, 2025). Generally, the majority of the world population relies heavily on public institutions; yet citizens' trust continues to dwindle. Governments require the public's trust and partnership to ensure the success of public development interventions (such as e-government initiatives, new public projects and programmes), and to deliver the anticipated benefits to the entire community (Throntveit, 2023; Lukman & Ndamase, 2026).

Against this background, restoring citizens' trust in public governance has remained a top priority to enhance long-term mutual relations between the government and citizens (Thronveit, 2023). The public value theory (PVT) is gaining momentum as a paradigm to inform emerging scholarly debates on the various ways to address the implications of a weak and fragmented public sector for citizens' trust and confidence in government.

This paper explores the shifting role of government in responding to evolving and complex public needs through the lens of PVT, guided by both theoretical perspectives and practical experience. It examines the utility of PVT as both an interpretive and analytical tool for appreciating the governments' re-orientation towards citizen-centred value creation, underlining the key transformative conduct, attitudes, and responsibilities of public officials. As argued by Jessa and Uys (2018), PVT holds that government bodies and citizens form part of an accountable, inclusive, and open stakeholder network, advancing networked governance practices and relationship-building. Therefore, this study draws on case studies from selected African public services to demonstrate how PVT can serve as a theoretical lens for establishing a vibrant public service underpinned by citizens' trust, thereby offering an in-depth appreciation of the public's values and preferences.

Notwithstanding the growing interest in PVT studies, a significant literature gap exists regarding the theory's use as an interpretive framework to gain deep insights into citizen-centred value creation, especially regarding the evolving trust and legitimacy in public governance. Extant research has underscored the normative or managerial aspects of PVT, raising fundamental questions about its application for explaining the dynamics of linkages between citizens and government offices (Liu & Han, 2026). This paper seeks to address this knowledge gap by leveraging PVT as an analytical tool for exploring the articulation and experiences of trust, collaborative, accountability, and network governance ethos within modern public governance environments. In doing so, the paper provides deep insights that are theoretically salient by advancing the conceptual knowledge of public value as underpinned by citizens' values, perceptions and experiences, and practically by illustrating governance arrangements which can promote more responsive, transparent, and trust-enhancing public service delivery.

2. Conceptualising Public Value Theory

PVT is a framework utilised to understand the responsiveness of public administration to democratically expressed goals, contrasting traditional and new public management approaches (Malang, 2021; Liou & Liou, 2022). PVT serves as an analytical tool that helps study how governments can align their actions to generate value for the public. Guided by this lens, value generation is related to deepening citizens' trust and confidence in government by promoting legitimacy and underscoring key governance fundamentals, including accountability, responsiveness, and transparency (Wu et al., 2022). Furthermore, PVT provides interpretive insights into topical discussions between Traditional Public Administration (TPA) and New Public Management (NPM), assisting with explanations of how diverse governance paradigms understand and advance value creation within the public and, sometimes, the private sector (Turkel & Turkel, 2016). Additionally, PVT provides space to explore the role of government in addressing evolving, complex societal problems, utilising a whole-of-government approach that attracts multiple stakeholders, especially in cases where perceived and experienced challenges exceed the capacity of a single stakeholder (OECD, 2019; Wu et al., 2022).

PVT serves as a fundamental tool in explaining the value of public management through equity indicators, user happiness, and key performance indicators, including appropriateness and efficiency. Based on the above, several scholars have concurred that PVT is a loaded concept, serving to explain communal expression, a product of both processes and outcomes that are key to generating public trust and equity. PVT is further simplified as a comprehensive strategy for public managers to improve public service delivery continuously. Jessa and Uys (2018) argue that PVT provides a framework for understanding both tangible and intangible services and products produced, managed, and evaluated by stakeholder teams that share a common vision arising from public needs, benefits, demands, and expectations.

The above assertion resonates with Moore's (1995) main agenda to design a conceptual framework useful to public managers in addressing strategic issues and the multifarious, complex decisional options required to tackle diverse public needs and expectations. Thus, the application of PVT also follows to meet private value considerations. Having this in mind, Moore's definition of "public value" points to a concept that assists us in linking what the public believes is valuable and expects prudent use of scarce public resources with a view to improving the appreciation of the "public value" essence. According to this famous scholar, 'PVT serves as an ideal framework that can be utilised by the public managers in undertaking their respective mandates and stimulate the 'missing strategic thinking' and 'entrepreneurial action' to address the growing complex issues of contemporary governance.

Importantly, PVT offers significant support and considerable analytic leverage for the present study, insofar as it establishes a normative-instrumental nexus between practices and outcomes in public trust. By considering the theory as a process-oriented and outcome-oriented construct, grounded in legitimacy, stakeholder co-creation, and accountability, the framework enables a critical interrogation of how contemporary governance practices might be reconfigured to support trust and increased confidence in a virtuous polity. Notably, the integrative capacity of the framework, in reconciling the normative foundations of TPA with the efficiency concerns of NPM, positions PVT as an appropriate framework for analysing trust limitations in complex networked governance contexts. Accordingly, the present study adopts the theory of public value not merely as a conceptual construct, but as a substantive evaluative framework within which the relationship between public value, institutional performance, and governance practices might be systematically analysed.

3. Methodology

This research adopted a qualitative approach which, as argued by Creswell & Creswell (2022), focuses on the collection and analysis of non-quantifiable data to deeply appreciate people's perceptions, ideas, experiences and concepts related to a given research phenomenon. In an endeavour to provide deep insights into citizen-centred value generation in public governance, the study utilised a structured literature review of scholarly and policy-based sources, interpreted through the lens of PVT. The PVT's historical and current accounts were also examined to assess the theory's future relevance for explaining the growing demand for citizen-centred public value creation in contemporary public governance. A documentary search was conducted, focusing on key academic databases such as Web of Science, SCOPUS, and Google Scholar. The search process entailed the integration of keywords including "public value", "public sector ethics", "public value theory", "public value management", "value creation", "accountability" and "public management". These keywords were utilised separately and in conjunction to acquire a wider yet critical body of literature.

The literature search focused on publications from 1990 to 2026, ensuring historical context and incorporating the most recent publications in the study field. The first search yielded a broader set of publications, which were subsequently selected based on their contribution to the research focus on trust, governance, and citizen-centred value creation. Inclusion criteria entailed peer-reviewed papers, policy documents, and working paper series which clearly focused on PVT or related governance theories. Sources which did not have explicit contributions to public governance or lacked engagement with citizen-centred value generation or trust were excluded.

Further to the above selection criterion, a further refinement of the most appropriate research was conducted for critical examination and interpretation. The content analysis method was then applied to systematically evaluate the screened literature, allowing the generation of key themes related to trust, legitimacy, accountability, and collaborative governance (Krippendorff, 2018). This method enabled an interpretive appreciation of the conceptualisation and articulation of trust issues, citizen-centred value creation and sustainability within the contemporary public governance discipline.

4. Role of Public Value in the Government Sector

Several attempts to articulate the distinctive value created by government officials possess a long and traceable intellectual pedigree (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2019). Classical political philosophers such as Aristotle engaged with related notions through concepts such as the 'public interest' and the common good', albeit with varying interpretations across historical contexts (Etzioni, 2014). In contemporary scholarship, nevertheless, the concept of 'public value' has been systematically developed within the fields of public management and governance (Moore, 1995; Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2019). It has increasingly gained prominence as a paradigmatic framework for addressing persistent governance issues, including accountability, declining public trust and operational inefficiencies within the public sector. It underlines the fundamental role of public managers in striking a balance between the basic requirement for efficient services provision and the citizens engagement in developing public policy and services (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins (2019).

In this respect, public value highlights the role of public managers in mediating between the need to provide an efficient service and the need to facilitate citizen involvement in the development and delivery of public policies (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2019). This mediation process is evident in the development of reforms across various African contexts. For example, in Kenya, the development of Huduma Centres reflects an attempt to improve service delivery efficiency while simultaneously enhancing the citizen experience and access to government services (Kemboi & Premanandam, 2025; Transparency International Kenya, 2025). In South Africa, participatory governance structures within municipal government reflect a concerted effort to institutionalise citizen participation in decision-making. However, service delivery protests reflect the challenge of translating participation into public trust (Msenge, 2024). These examples of public value as both an ideal and a managerial practice highlight the inherent tension among efficiency, participation, and legitimacy in public sector governance.

Based on Moore's (1995) framework, public sector managers must create public value, despite the assumption that this sector is not generally viewed as a value-producing one, at least not as much as the private sector. Therefore, the day-to-day activities of the public manager within the government structure are expected to align with the aspirations of the people and elected officials collectively. In the context of the political environment, the public manager must be able to address three key dimensions, as conceptualised by Moore's (1995) strategic triangle (Figure 1), namely public value outcomes, legitimacy and support, and operational capacity.

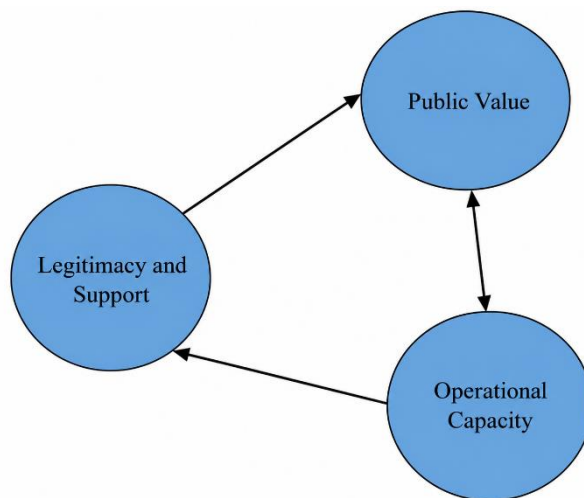


Figure 1. Public value creation framework
Source: Author, based on Moore (1995)

The strategic triangle is an essential concept in PVT, serving as a model for conceptualising, generating, and evaluating public value within government institutions. Legitimacy and support are closely linked with the degree of authority vested in public institutions and actors. This calls for a corresponding integration between political imperatives and stakeholder interests. On the other hand, operational capacity refers to the institutional and organisational capacity that is essential in realising public value. These two aspects are closely linked in their creation of a system that facilitates the creation, evaluation, and communication of public value to the public (Jessa & Uys, 2018).

In practice, the salience of the strategic triangle is evident in the governance systems of various African countries. In Rwanda, for instance, the application of Imihigo contracts for enhanced performance demonstrates a clear connection between legitimacy (based on national development goals), operational capacity (through institutional targets), and identifiable public value in sectors such as health and education (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2026; International Monetary Fund, 2025). In another African country, Kenya, Huduma Centres reveal the connection between operational capacity (efficiency in delivering services) and legitimacy, as these are required for achieving identifiable public value, such as in improving access to services delivered by the government (World Bank, 2022; Kenya News Agency, 2025; Mwenda, 2026). On the contrary, in Nigeria, the disconnect in the strategic triangle has been revealed in the weakening legitimacy, institutional capacity, and service delivery outcomes, especially in sectors such as electricity and health (World Health Organisation, 2025; Okunola & Ayodele, 2026).

Essentially, the strategic triangle is based on the following three principles of public sector governance: (i) the purpose of government is to create public value, (ii) public actions must be politically legitimate, legally justifiable, and supported by key stakeholders, and (iii) public sector operations must be administratively feasible and supported by sufficient organisational capacity (Mazzucato & Ryan-Collins, 2019). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that such dimensions are not necessarily fully aligned with public sector operations and that public managers must manage trade-offs among values, such as efficiency and inclusiveness, or between political and administrative feasibility (Turkel & Turkel, 2016; Cabral et al., 2019). These issues are exemplified in the South African public sector, where there is considerable constitutional and participatory legitimacy, influencing public service delivery (National Treasury (South Africa), 2024; Auditor-General South Africa, 2025). Therefore, public value initiatives may be subject to change in line with the interests of different stakeholders. Related to Turkel and Turkel (2016), who suggest that the strategic triangle is an instrument of public sector leadership, Jessa and Uys (2018:301) note that public value initiatives must satisfy the dimensions of political sustainability, public confidence, and administrative feasibility.

More fundamentally, the strategic triangle serves as a basic framework for understanding the purpose of government and the imperative to align government institutions' performance with the public's values and expectations. As such, applying the strategic triangle in the African region is essential for understanding its viability, particularly its weaknesses.

5. The nexus between Public Value Theory and Public Trust

Public trust is a multifaceted, multidimensional concept that has attracted significant attention in the governance literature as a key driver of sustainable public administration. The enhancement of citizen trust is increasingly recognised as a key imperative for public organisations, given its significant link to the processes and outcomes of public policy implementation. Generally speaking, trust can be defined as the predisposition of one actor to be vulnerable to another actor's actions, with the expectation that those actions are appropriate or beneficial, even in the absence of monitoring or controlling the actor. From this perspective, public sector organisations recognise the importance of citizen trust as the driver of public value creation.

From the perspective of PVT, trust plays an important role both as an input and an output of public value generation. Citizens' trust in public institutions motivates them to support initiatives that generate public value. This has been witnessed in South Africa, where the decline of the African National Congress (ANC) in recent elections indicates an increase in public discontent resulting from poor governance and other challenges (European Union, 2023; Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA), 2024). This has led to a shift towards coalition politics, underscoring the importance of trust in public value generation and the need for public institutions to be reconfigured for continuity when trust levels are low.

A similar trend has also been observed in Zimbabwe, where public trust has been undermined by poor election management. For example, during the 2008 elections, several irregularities were reported, culminating in the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) (Mwonzora & Xaba, 2020). This entailed a decline in citizens' trust in public institutions (Mwonzora & Xaba, 2020; European Union, 2023). The reluctance of the then-opposition leaders to accept election results also indicates that trust plays an important role in public value generation and that low levels of trust often threaten it. The aforementioned examples demonstrate the importance of trust in the creation of public value and the potential danger of its erosion to that creation. The critical role of PVT as an analytical approach to creating public value cannot be overstated, as the theory redefines the evaluation of government performance from efficiency/effectiveness to public value constructs such as legitimacy, equity, and satisfaction.

The theory further asserts that government performance should be evaluated based on its capacity to improve citizens' lives and align with public expectations. When government performance fails to align with public expectations, the government may be viewed as ineffective, corrupt, and unresponsive to citizens' diverse needs and preferences, leading to a decline in public value. The importance of public value is epitomised by the governance challenges in South Africa, especially in recent times, as evidenced by the high-profile corruption cases involving key government officials such as Jacob Zuma and Cyril Ramaphosa (Patel & Govindasamy, 2021). The recent allegations of state capture and cases such as the Bosasa scandal have significantly affected public trust in political leadership and government institutions (Patel & Govindasamy, 2021; Financial Times, 2026). In this context of challenges, the need to enhance public trust calls for strategic alignment with the essential principles of public values (Thabit, Sancino & Mora, 2025). Three dimensions are essential in this context.

Transparency

This dimension focuses on the openness of the government's operations and processes. For instance, the development of performance monitoring systems in Rwanda has helped improve perceptions of government accountability, thereby enhancing public trust (Sabbi & Ndikubwimana, 2024).

Responsiveness

This dimension focuses on the capacity of public institutions to effectively and promptly attend to citizens' needs. Innovations in the delivery of public services in Kenya, such as the Huduma Centres, have increased citizens' satisfaction with government services (Vignieri & Santoni, 2026).

Consistency and Predictability

This dimension focuses on the government's capacity to implement its policies consistently and predictably. The relatively consistent implementation of sound pro-poor public policies in Botswana has helped to sustain public trust in the government over the years.

Consequently, the link between the importance of transparency within the public sector and the concept of public sector trust is based on the capacity of government institutions to align with the culture, values, and norms of the broader public sector (Esposito et al., 2025). As such, the concept of restoring public trust can be seen not only as

essential from a political standpoint but also as essential to the creation of public sector values as a whole within modern systems of public sector governance.

6. Digital Co-creation, Transparency and Citizen Participation

Contemporary governance systems increasingly reflect the fundamental role of digitalisation in promoting transparency and enhancing public value creation (Luna, Picazo-Vela & Buyannemekh, 2024). Importantly, contemporary societies are widely adopting digital platforms, open data systems, and e-government systems to enhance access to information, rationalise public service delivery, and allow greater accountability (Zyzak, Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek, & Jensen, 2024; OECD, 2024). Additionally, digitalisation is increasingly influencing greater citizen participation in governance systems and the co-creation of public value (Ofoma, 2024; Tang & Fillip, 2025). For example, Kenya presents a strong case with its digital governance platforms, including the eCitizen platform and Huduma centres, demonstrating how new technology adoption can enhance citizen participation and the co-creation of public value. These innovations have allowed millions of users to access quality services more conveniently and, simultaneously, serve as appropriate platforms for feedback and engagement with government institutions (Tang & Fillip, 2025; Liang et al., 2025).

In Rwanda, lived experience shows that digital adoption is key to promoting transparency and rationalising public service delivery. The introduction of the IrengoGov platform enabled public access to online public services, minimising unnecessary bureaucratic inertia and reducing the risk of corruption. Through the decentralisation of service provision and the enabling of digital business, the online initiative has greatly enhanced administrative efficiency and, at the same time, boosted transparency and accountability in government systems and processes. Empirical evidence indicates that such collaborative digital spaces can improve transparency and accountability, thereby boosting public trust, even though issues associated with digital inclusion persist. From the PVT standpoint, these initiatives reflect the evolution of public value from improved accessibility, efficiency, and responsiveness in governance practice (Sangwa & Mutabazi, 2025).

Increasingly, online platforms—such as social media—have been widely utilised by the public to participate in critical policy discussions and monitor the government's actions for transparency and accountability, as demonstrated in recent youth-led mobilisations in most African countries (Rulandari & Silalahi, 2025; Vukethwele, Fihla & Chinomona, 2026). These developments demonstrate the critical role of digital space in broadening inclusive governance practices and promoting the interaction between citizens and the state. Nevertheless, challenges such as the digital divide and a high illiteracy rate, as well as system reliability, continue to influence user experiences and trust outcomes (Liu & Han, 2026).

Digital tools enhance the co-design of policies and services by integrating citizen inputs, values, and experiences into governance systems and processes. They also enable the general public to monitor the performance of public officials within government institutions and to participate actively in decision-making processes, thereby building citizens' trust and institutional legitimacy (Asmawanti et al., 2025). For instance, in Nigeria, the introduction of digital governance platforms led to significant improvements in service delivery and enhanced transparency and accountability within government ministries and departments (Inakefe Inakefe, Bassey, & Amadi, 2024). In particular, the integration of digital platforms and Artificial Intelligence (AI) into state-level civil service reforms improved administrative coordination and transparency (Rulandari & Silalahi, 2025; Ndamase, Ntando & Ncama, 2026). These commitments reflect the future of digitalisation in enhancing public policy outcomes, especially in terms of efficiency and monitoring. Nevertheless, persistent problems—such as infrastructure gaps, limited access to digital tools, and institutional capacity issues—remain a key barrier to the utility of these innovations.

Previous studies reveal that, even though digital platforms may be key to boosting public trust, transparency, and accountability, their contribution is anchored on implementation quality and context-specific considerations. For instance, the Ghanaian experience demonstrates that digitalisation, on its own, cannot automatically result in

enhanced citizen satisfaction, as wider contextual and socio-economic factors also shape public value creation and sustainability (Liu & Han, 2026). This underlines the centrality of taking digitalisation as one aspect within a broader governance ecosystem. Interpreted through the lens of PVT, these experiences point to digitalisation as part of the continuous transformation towards more collaborative and networked governance systems. In such environments, public value is influenced by relationships between government institutions and the public, rather than being exclusively derived from top-down decision-making processes (Ofoma, 2024; Liu & Han, 2026).

7. Practical challenges related to citizen- centred value creation via the PVT lens

PVT is seen as highly significant and influential within the realm of public administration as a whole, although there are notable challenges in translating public value creation into reality. The concept of citizen-centred public value creation has faced certain criticisms for being ambiguous and lacking a clear conceptualisation. It is noteworthy that Moore himself does not discuss the concept in the field of public administration, which creates flexibility but also ambiguity (Malang, 2021). On the contrary, Bozeman (2007) has taken a rather normative approach, arguing that the concept of public value creation is rooted in the values of citizens and political actors. This creates a tension between the normative and managerial aspects of PVT.

A major problem with PVT's influence on government operations is the effective interpretation of people's needs and preferences in a pluralistic society. In most political systems, the people have diverse cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds, leading to conflicting needs and priorities (Malang, 2021; Throntveit, 2023). Therefore, any attempt to define exactly what is meant by the term 'public value' is inevitably an act of judgment by the institution about who is prioritised in the decision-making process. This is especially true in a heterogeneous country like Nigeria, where diversity in ethnicity, regions, and religion makes it difficult to reach consensus on national priorities, leading to conflicting perceptions of the government's legitimacy.

The problem of preference aggregation has long been a concern in welfare economics and decision theory, where reconciling individual and collective choices is inherently complex (Malang, 2021). One of the earliest contributions to this discourse was Arrow's impossibility theorem, cited in Livson and Prokopenko (2025), which showed that no voting system could aggregate individual preferences into a collective choice that satisfies certain reasonable conditions. The findings indicate that realising a well-balanced and reliable combination of distinct and joint preferences remains inherently problematic in practice. This suggests the fundamental challenges embedded in citizen-centred public value creation processes. These constraints demonstrate structural setbacks rooted in shared decision-making instead of limitations of any single conceptual framework. The impossibility theorem has been reflected in some of the challenges experienced in Africa when studying public value. For example, in Kenya, reconciling national and county interests has been a concern since the implementation of the devolution strategy (World Bank, 2022). In South Africa, protests over service delivery during the past decades reflect a significant gap between what the government has identified as priorities and what citizens feel is of value.

Apart from integrating citizens' preferences, governance practice raises an underlying issue in evaluating value, since value is generated and experienced by citizens themselves. Unlike the private sector, this value cannot be easily quantified, especially when the process involves intangible factors such as trust, legitimacy, social cohesion, and equity. These aspects of value are difficult to standardise and compare, especially when they occur in different settings. In the Zimbabwean context, the economic and political challenges have created an environment of mistrust, making it difficult to develop a standard by which the public value can be measured, as highlighted by the European Union (2023). This situation has raised serious concerns about the reliability of PVT performance indicators for explaining public value creation in practice.

Institutional capacity constraints have also increased the complexity of implementing PVT. The creation of public value depends on the availability of skilled personnel, financial resources, and administrative capacity. In most

African countries, the lack of capacities has created an environment that makes it difficult for public institutions to realise the normative value of creating value in the public sphere. In Ghana, the government's efforts to create value at the local level through the decentralisation agenda were not successful in some districts due to a lack of administrative capacity.

Politics and governance can also affect public value creation. Uganda presents a perfect example of how the high prioritisation of limited public resources towards electoral mobilisation and patronage systems has raised great concern regarding equitable service delivery (Kiwanka, 2026). Equally, in Nigeria, widespread cases of clientelism and politically driven public funds allocation—especially in sectors like energy and infrastructure—have been argued to generate inequitable development policy outcomes (Zovighian, 2026). In the case of DRC, governance issues associated with political instability and elite hegemony have repeatedly undermined the provision of public services (Afrobarometer, 2024).

These experiences demonstrate the negative effects of undue political considerations within governance processes on public resource distribution and ownership, at times benefiting very narrow interests at the expense of broader citizens' needs. Based on public experiences, the above dynamics can result in the erosion of value and trust within public institutions, undermining the co-creation of public value, particularly in equity, legitimacy, and service delivery outcomes. In the face of the above challenges, it is evident that while PVT is a robust framework that is both normatively and analytically sound, in practice, it needs to be adapted to the context. From the inherent tensions and challenges of the theory, it is evident that public value is not a fixed, agreed-upon concept; instead, it is a process in constant flux.

8. Citizen-centred Value Creation and the Future of PVT

The discipline of public administration is characterised by changes in public management from a traditional model underpinned by hierarchies to the NPM, which is punctuated by market systems. The same field has reached a management system via a network, based on "public value". Global evidence of transformative societal concerns and the general public's aggressive demand that the government remain accountable, responsive, and transparent indicates high expectations that PVT can play a larger role in explaining the evolving public trust and value creation in contemporary politics. This study concludes on the fundamentals underpinning PVT to understand the creation and experience of public value within the modern governance system. It underlines the mandate of public institutions to enhance citizen-centred public value creation and sustainability (Moore, 1995), and offers a complementary role in appreciating transformative public sector management practices.

Moore's line of thinking has gained popularity amongst researchers, public sector managers, and practitioners. As has been alluded to earlier, the public administration discipline has, traditionally, been under serious attack for its failure to generate value for society. The classical public management approaches generate value through efficiency in the production process. Modern public management processes and systems are indicative of a gradual transformation of governance frameworks, with a growing focus changing from cost efficiency towards addressing wider, socially anticipated outcomes. These experiences can be meaningfully understood through the lens of PVT. Meeting these diverse public needs and preferences requires the public administration discipline to understand better what is socially desirable and to address emerging transformations in citizens' expectations aggressively. The PVT's thesis revolves around the strategic triangle, which is based on three factors linked to each other to explain the above governance evolution.

One possible role of PVT is to explain the current integration of emerging technologies and data-driven approaches. The global reliance on artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and digital platforms presents governments with a unique opportunity to improve their capacity to deliver public benefit. The incorporation of contemporary technologies into public governance provides a platform for better evaluation of public preferences, more efficient resource allocation, and enhanced service delivery efficiency and responsiveness (Wu et al., 2022).

PVT provides a critical tool for interrogating how these innovations can promote citizens' trust and value creation. Commendably, most countries are investing in advanced technologies to meet the changing public values and presence associated with the digital economy.

Additionally, the future of PVT points to expanding its application beyond interpreting conventional government boundaries to incorporate a wider network of stakeholders and interested parties, key principles for enhancing good governance. Given the growing governance complexity and the involvement of multiple actors and collaborations, PVT can serve as a theoretical basis for explaining the imperative to bind diverse interests, coordinate efforts, and capitalise on overall impact (Vallentin, 2022). Modern public management practice increasingly emphasises integrative, whole-of-government approaches to address multifaceted policy issues. In this vein, PVT provides an important interpretive tool for exploring how government organisations navigate these problems by promoting comprehensive decision-making models that foster trust and legitimacy among different stakeholders (Liu & Han, 2026). This view reflects the centrality of co-creation, partnership, and public engagement as drivers of co-defining public objectives and of mobilising collective resources to address citizens' preferences. As argued by Wu et al. (2022), PVT is expected to have a significant impact on strategic public administration in the coming years by tackling challenges that extend beyond individual businesses through collaborative efforts and community initiatives. Complex societal challenges, such as information overload and technological revolution, can undermine the government's capacity to run effectively and efficiently, thereby eroding public trust (Vallentin, 2022).

This study also predicts a greater emphasis on outcomes-based accountability and performance management, grounded in the fundamentals of PVT. Rather than simply prioritising inputs and outputs, PVT encourages evaluating public institutions' success by examining the tangible outcomes they generate for the general populace (Liou & Liou, 2022). By giving priority to values and preferences such as equity, social justice, and environmental sustainability, PVT can help public institutions demonstrate their strong commitment to operating in the best interests of citizens and generating appropriate value for society. In turn, this can reconfigure public trust and confidence in the government's capacity and dedication to realise significant outcomes.

Modern public governance highlights an increasing emphasis on ethical leadership, integrity, and dedication towards citizen-centred value creation within governmental institutions. Growing public demands for transparency and accountability have underscored the imperative to foster a culture of honesty, responsibility, and ethical decision-making within public institutions (Wu et al., 2022). Anchored on PVT, these developments may be understood as supporting the values which define effective and trustworthy public service. The theory proposes that explaining the nature of governance in the twenty-first century requires encouraging good governance, responsible stewardship, and public engagement, which are likely to instil confidence and trust among the public. This is also supported by Howe (2023), who suggests that PVT can serve as a key interpretive tool in governance studies focused on achieving the outcomes of democracy and on developing a culture of accountability and transparency.

Additionally, the theory serves as a critical tool for analysing the relationship between conventional governance practices and entrepreneurial activities, which intensify wealth creation in the public and private sectors (Liou & Liou, 2022). Therefore, restoring public trust is of utmost importance in the face of an evolving socio-political landscape, as witnessed by the existence of the Russian Federation's National Guard (Throntveit, 2023). Furthermore, the global experience with the COVID-19 pandemic also underscores the need to restore public trust in research, as evidenced by the imperative to follow the dictates of science and accountability. The future of PVT hinges on bolstering public confidence, improving democratic procedures, and promoting active participation for efficient governance in an interconnected global village.

9. Conclusions

The discipline of public administration continues to undergo significant paradigm shifts, reflecting evolving expectations regarding the role of government in complex and dynamic societies. These transformations raise fundamental questions for both scholars and practitioners concerning how public institutions can effectively deliver value while maintaining legitimacy and trust. Within this context, this study has demonstrated the analytical and practical relevance of PVT as an emerging framework capable of shaping the future trajectory of public management and governance. The proliferation of competing public management theories and approaches underscores the growing renewed scholarly and practical interest in identifying models that generate both theoretical insight and real-world applicability. PVT distinguishes itself by challenging the limitations of earlier paradigms—particularly TPA and NPM—which tended to prioritise bureaucratic efficiency or market-oriented performance at the expense of broader societal outcomes. Instead, PVT advances a more holistic understanding of governance, underscoring the creation of collective value, the centrality of citizen engagement, and the importance of trust as a core public-sector outcome.

This study concludes that PVT offers a compelling lens for reconfiguring governance structures by redefining the roles of both the state and citizens in the co-creation and delivery of public services. Empirical illustrations from contexts such as South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe and Rwanda demonstrate that while public value principles can enhance service delivery, accountability, and citizen engagement, their effectiveness remains contingent upon the alignment of institutional capacity, political legitimacy, and societal expectations. These cases further reveal that deficits in any of these dimensions can undermine public trust and weaken overall governance outcomes. Central to this reconfiguration is the enduring relevance of Moore (1995)'s strategic triangle, which highlights the necessity of aligning the authorising environment, operational capacity, and public value objectives. This framework not only clarifies the distinct characteristics of the public sector relative to the private sector, but also provides a practical tool for public managers navigating complex governance environments. However, as this study has shown, achieving such alignment in practice remains challenging, particularly in contexts characterised by institutional constraints, political contestation, and diverse societal preferences.

This study provides deep, novel insights by reorienting PVT as an interpretive tool for appreciating citizen-centred value creation in contemporary governments, rather than as a prescriptive or causal tool. Pursuant to the above, the theory demonstrates how issues of trust, legitimacy, and value generation can be more coherently understood when grounded in citizens' perceptions and experiences of governance processes. The study further advances existing scholarship by demonstrating how public institutions can be analysed in terms of their orientation towards accountability, responsiveness, and collaborative engagement, particularly in addressing complex societal challenges. By integrating theoretical perspectives with practical observations, the paper offers a nuanced understanding of how value is conceptualised and realised in contemporary public governance contexts.

Suggested Areas for further study

It is clear that this research has established the analytical and practical significance of PVT for explaining the evolving public trust and value creation within contemporary government institutions, yet several avenues for further research remain. Future research should adopt an empirical approach to explore how citizen-centred public value creation is operationalised and measured across different contexts, particularly in less-researched regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. Future research should also longitudinally assess the relationship between public value creation and trust, particularly in politically dynamic environments such as Uganda, the DRC, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria, where public sector reform and trust are constantly evolving.

Future research should also further develop and assess how public value is measured and evaluated, particularly across less tangible elements such as legitimacy, equity, and satisfaction. Comparative research should also be conducted to assess how PVT could be more universally applied across different administrative traditions, such as in Botswana and Rwanda. Furthermore, there is potential for interdisciplinary research that could combine elements of political science, behavioural economics, and data science to assess further how citizen interests are formed and how they could be more effectively harnessed. Ultimately, advancing PVT requires a shift from predominantly conceptual debates towards more rigorous, evidence-based analyses that can inform both theory development and practical governance reforms in Africa and beyond.

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