
Service Recovery Perceived by Customers in Egyptian Hotels with Reference to Gender

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Abstract

This paper aims at examining the effect of customers' gender on their perceptions of service recovery process. The relative weight of justice types (Distributive, Procedural and Interactional) as a basis for service recovery process was evaluated from the gender point of view to stand on the suitable way to handle service failure for males compared to females. A questionnaire form was designed including two parts to determine service recovery process employed by hotels and relevant customers satisfaction with regard to gender. Sharm-Elsheikh hotels were selected for the survey. Data were analyzed using SPSS (V. 22) program. The results indicated that males concentrate on distributive justice related to having tangible outcomes next to service failure occurrence. On the other side, females give priority to procedural and interactional justice, i.e. having more explanation about service failure, occurrence reasons and to be treated politely, honestly and quickly. The results may assist hotels management to better manage service failures considering gender preferences.

Key words: Service recovery, service failure, gender, hospitality industry.

Introduction

To survive on today's competitive markets, service providers have to increase their market share and profitability (Enz, 2011). Given that businesses lose about 50 per cent of their consumers every 5 years according to some estimates (Mack *et al.*, 2000), attention should be paid to customer retention, especially that retaining an existing customer is less costly than attracting a new one (attracting new customers costs five times that of retaining the existing ones) (Dominici and Guzzo, 2010).

Naturally, service organizations may fail to achieve 100 per cent satisfaction depending on the characteristics of services, like: Intangibility (cannot be evaluated prior to purchasing); inseparability (simultaneous production and consumption) and heterogeneity (variation of performance from producer to another) (Wang and Chang 2013). Moreover, hotels' operation is continuous (24/7) and includes a high level of interaction between consumers and employees where mistakes tend to be larger (Lewis and McCann, 2004).

Service failure results in customer dissatisfaction and complaint, which in turn cause harmful outcomes for service providers, as customers loss and negative word-of-mouth (Kuenzel and Katsaris, 2009).

Balancing the need for defect-free service against the inevitable service failure, organizations have to be pro-active in addressing probable failures areas and anticipating the recovery needs (Hu *et al.*, 2013). Service provider's response to service failure can alter customers' attitude toward the service provider (either negatively, or positively) (Kim *et al.*, 2009). This demonstrates the reasons behind conducting market research on current and potential consumers' needs and expectations (Salavou, 2010).

Given that customers' gender may affect the response towards service recovery process, understanding customers' perceptions regarding what matters in the context of service failure are imperative prior to formulating recovery plan (Boo *et al.*, 2013). Despite the numerous researches on service recovery in the Egyptian hospitality industry (e.g. Abou Taleb and Abou Kamar, 2013; Essawy, 2016), the effect of gender on the perception of service recovery process is lacking, a gap this paper aims to fill.

Service Recovery

Service recovery involves the procedures taken by service providers to decrease customer's inconveniences caused by service failure via detecting, solving and preventing future failure (Nibkin *et al.*, 2010). Service recovery is different from complaint management regarding the response time; complaint management is reactive, while service recovery is proactive (Chang and Hsiao, 2008). Service recovery strategies encompass both methods (tangible components like compensation) and mechanism (the way of interacting with the customer) by which organizations try to retain their customers (Ekiz and Arasli, 2007).

Performing service recovery process effectively can reduce the drawbacks of service failure, turn unhappy customers into satisfied ones and consequently increase customer's loyalty and confidence, as customers base the assessment of service quality on the actions undertaken to remedy service to cope with their expectations (Smith *et al.*, 2012). Service recovery can increase repurchase behaviors, firm's profitability, spread good words about the hotel (Johnson and Michel, 2008). Since the immediate aim of service recovery is to satisfy the dissatisfied customers, the long-term aim is to create strong relationships with customers. After successful recovery, customers may be more committed to the firm as if no failure had occurred (Ha and Jang, 2009).

For recovering dissatisfied customers, service providers have to go about the recovery process appropriately. Customers' evaluation of organizational service recovery efforts is hooked upon the perceived justice (Liao, 2007). In other words, service recovery requires providing customers with resources that equal the type of the experienced loss (Sousa and Voss, 2009). Totally, justice perceptions have a significant impact on emotions, especially in severe failures cases (Choi and Choi, 2014).

Justice Theory in Service Recovery

Within every service encounter, customers make evaluation of justice and compare actual service delivery to expectation and the corresponding level of disconfirmation. Service failure occurs in case the initial service is unacceptable where service recovery becomes necessary (Steyn *et al.*, 2011). The recovery effort should be tailored to suit customer recovery expectations. Based on the perceptions of justice, recovery expectations determine customer satisfaction with the recovery and thereby recovery effectiveness (del Río-Lanza *et al.*, 2009).

Justice concept has its foundation in social psychology (Adams, 1965); it had been adopted to explain human's judgment on the way of dealing with others. In theorizing justice, it encompasses three dimensions: distributive, procedural, and interactional justice.

Distributive justice refers to the perceived fairness of the outcome provided by the property to the dissatisfied customer (Shapiro and Nieman-Gonder, 2006). Distributive justice requires mainly giving a satisfactory compensation to consumers next to service failure occurrence (Park *et al.*, 2008). A favorable outcome is expected once consumers had received some sort of resources to amend errors (Kwon and Jang, 2012).

For achieving distributive justice service providers have to consider three principles, namely (1- equity: provision of compensation proportional to inputs to an exchange; 2- equality: equal compensation compared to others in the same situation, and 3- need: considering personal requirements in compensation regardless of the failure situation) (Tax *et al.*, 1998).

Procedural justice describes the perceived fairness of the process employed to solve the occurred problem (property's policies used to handle the problems) (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002).

Procedural justice depends on five principles that are (1- process control: liberty of the customer to provide views on the decision process; 2- decision control: the extent to which the customer has the liberty to accept or refuse the decision outcome.; 3- accessibility: engaging in the process easily; 4- timing/speed: sufficient time deployed to complete the process; and 5- flexibility: procedures adaptability to suit individual circumstances) (McColl-Kennedy and Sparks, 2003).

Interactional justice refers to the perceived fairness of the manner by which the service process is carried out and information is communicated to the customer by the service provider (Smith *et al.*, 1999).

According to Tax *et al.* (1998) interactional justice principles are 1- explanation: providing customers with failure reasons; 2- honesty: actuality of the provided reasons (details); 3- Politeness: courtesy of employees in treating customers during recovery process; 4- effort: devotion of employees during recovery process and 5- Empathy: Paying care to individual attention.

Notwithstanding the importance of justice theory, the ability of justice dimensions to achieve customers' satisfaction towards service recovery process may be biased by the gender

Gender

Analyzing consumers differences regarding their demographic characteristics, variation was noted between the behavior of males and females regarding information processing and decision making (Palan, 2001). So customers' categorization may guide employees to reduce complexity and better administer the process of customer interaction (Dong *et al.*, 2008).

This calls for conducting more studies on the context of gender and service recovery to improve the recovery process. Actually in service firms, there is paucity of researches that explore gender perception in service recovery processes (Cambra-Fierro *et al.*, 2013).

Methodology

Sample and Data Collection

Testing the customers' perceptions of service recovery regarding their gender, a three-section questionnaire was designed based on the study of Matilla (2001) and Smith *et al.* (1999), the first contains question about respondent's gender, the second consists of 17 questions measuring hotels' application of distributive, procedural and interactional justice basics in handling service failure. Finally, the third section measures customers' satisfaction with service recovery process conducted by the hotel. The questions were rated on a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The research community consists of 20 hotels and resorts (a random sample) in Sharm El Sheikh City, the questionnaire (500 copies) was distributed among hotel customers (each hotel 25 copies), 316 copies were collected with a response rate of 63.2%, including 162 copies for males (51.3%) and 154 for females (48.7%). The study was conducted in May - October 2018.

SPSS version 22 was used to fill missing data, making sure that the study data was free of multicollinearity and outliers. Skewness and Kurtosis were also used to verify the consistency of the data with the normal distribution. Additionally, the mean, standard deviation, and regression were calculated to explore the relationship between the variables of the study.

Results and discussion

Reliability and validity analysis

The most popular test of inter-item consistency reliability is Cronbach's coefficient alpha. If it reaches 70% becomes good. The higher the coefficient, the better the measuring instrument (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013).

Table (1): Cronbach's alpha for the questionnaire dimensions

Dimensions	Cronbach's alpha "Reliability"	Validity	N of Items
Procedural Justice	.73	.86	7
Interactional justice	.80	.90	8
Distributive justice	.78	.88	2
Justice	.86	.93	17
Satisfaction	.85	.92	4
	.90	.95	21

Table (1) illustrates high reliability coefficients for the questionnaire attributes, indicating a satisfactory internal consistency, and shows also a high validity for the questionnaire attributes, meaning that the variables measure what was set for it.

Descriptive analysis

Table (2): the procedural justice dimension

Items		Mean	S. D	Skewnes s	Kurtosis
1	I got a chance to tell the hotel my problem.	4.21	.858	-.895	.532
2	The complaint process was easy to access.	4.10	.822	-.362	-.983
3	The responsible in the hotel listened to the entire details	3.81	.975	-.433	-.265
4	The responsible in the hotel responded quickly to me.	3.68	1.067	-.526	-.382
5	The responsible in the hotel explained the events which led to the failure.	3.91	.913	-.574	.151
6	It was easy for me to figure out to whom I should complain in the hotel.	4.11	.844	-.493	-.577
7	The arrangements for handling service failure worked smoothly.	4.07	.927	-.838	.334
Total		3.98	.568	-.242	-.206

Table (2) shows some descriptive statistics of the procedural justice dimension. The data shows that the mean score for this variable was 3.98, statistically meaning that the hotels have specific policies to handle service failure. Also, it is apparent that hotels are very interested in giving the opportunity to customers to give the whole details (M= 4.21; S.D = 0.858), however, the response to the complaints is not quick to some extent (M= 3.68; S.D =1.067). In general, it seems that the hotels adopt the principles of the procedural justice cited by McColl-Kennedy and Sparks (2003), which are: 1- process control; 2- decision control; 3- accessibility; 4- timing/speed; and 5- flexibility. Generally, the statistics showed that most of the values of skewness were between the accepted absolute value +1 (Meyers *et al.*, 2006), also the values of kurtosis were between the accepted absolute value +2 (Gravetter and Wallnau, 2014), The acceptable level of skewness and kurtosis proves the normal univariate distribution.

Table (3): the interactional justice dimension

Items	Mean	S. D	skewness	kurtosis
1 The responsible seemed very interested in helping me.	4.01	.853	-.420	-.653
2 The responsible told me why the service failed in the first place.	4.09	.849	-.464	-.792
3 The responsible tried hard to solve the problem.	4.11	.832	-.449	-.825
4 The responsible was attentive in providing good services.	3.99	.894	-.484	-.509
5 The responsible listened politely to me.	4.12	.833	-.455	-.830
6 The responsible seemed to be very concerned about my problem.	4.00	.877	-.455	-.650
7 The responsible seemed very understanding about the problem I have experienced.	4.08	.891	-.542	-.595
8 The responsible was courteous to me.	4.01	.891	-.459	-.732
Total	4.05	.561	-.130	-.526

Table (3) reveals some descriptive statistics of the interactional justice dimension. The mean score of this dimension was 4.05, meaning that the hotels adopt the interactional justice principles cited by Tax *et al.* (1998), namely 1- explanation; 2- honesty; 3- politeness; 4- effort and 5- empathy.

Table (4): the distributive justice dimension

Items	Mean	S. D	Skewness	Kurtosis
1 In resolving the complaint, the hotel gave me what I needed.	4.02	.974	-.944	.521
2 Taking everything into consideration, the result was fair.	4.09	.934	-.830	.142
Total	4.05	.862	-.901	.419

Table (4) shows that the mean score of this dimension was 4.05, reflecting that the hotels often tend to satisfactorily compensate consumers once a service failure occurs. The table also shows that service providers in the hotels follow the principles of distributive justice (equity; equality and need) (Tax *et al.*, 1998).

Table (5): satisfaction with service recovery process

Items	Mean	S. D	Skewness	Kurtosis
1 How satisfied would you be with the hotel's handling of your problem?	4.24	.831	-1.009	.696
2 Overall, I would feel the hotel's efforts to address my problem are good.	4.12	.899	-1.156	1.432
3 Overall, I would be satisfied with the way this problem was handled.	4.13	.918	-.904	.236
4 I would think that this hotel provided a satisfactory resolution to my problem.	4.07	.922	-1.014	.809
Total	4.14	.740	-1.010	1.261

Table (5) provides some descriptive statistics about customer satisfaction with the service recovery process. As the table shows, the mean was 4.14, describing that the hotels were successful in handling service failure.

Correlation and Regression

Table (6): Pearson's correlation between justice dimensions and guest satisfaction

gender	Independent	Procedural justice	Interactional justice	Distributive justice
	Dependent			
Male	Guest satisfaction	.503**	.646**	.810**
Female	Guest satisfaction	.675**	.623**	.381**

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 (2-tailed).

It is apparent from table (6) that there was a strong significant positive correlation between Procedural, Interactional, and Distributive justice (justice dimensions) and the level of customer satisfaction with service recovery, except for the distributive justice in the case of females, where its effect is medium. Generally, all the correlations were statistically significant at (0.01).

Table (7): multiple regression for males

Variables	β (Beta)	Sig.	T-value	Adjusted R ²	R ²	F	Total Sig.
Procedural Justice	.127	.009	2.647	.724	.730	142.116	.000
Interactional justice	.251	.000	4.861				
Distributive justice	.621	.000	12.307				

Multiple regression analysis was used to predict the impact of applying justice dimensions during the service recovery process on the customer satisfaction in case of males. Table (7) indicated that adopting the justice dimensions is a significant predictor of customer satisfaction with the service recovery. This model is significant (P=.000), and the adjusted R² reached (.724), meaning that applying justice dimensions during service recovery process was able to explain (72 %) of changes in males' satisfaction. Also, it is apparent that males were interested in distributive justice (β=.621: P=.000), followed by interactional justice (β=.251: P= .000) and finally procedural justice (β=.127: P= .009).

Table (8): multiple regression for females

Variables	β (Beta)	Sig.	T-value	Adjusted R ²	R ²	F	Total Sig.
Procedural Justice	.436	.000	6.430	.549	.558	63.154	.000
Interactional justice	.345	.000	5.254				
Distributive justice	.130	.028	2.222				

Multiple regression analysis was adopted to assess the impact of applying justice dimensions during the service recovery process on females satisfaction. Table (8) indicated significantly that justice dimensions is a significant predictor of females satisfaction ($P = .000$), and the adjusted R^2 reached (.549), meaning that applying justice dimensions during the service recovery process explains (55 %) of changes in females satisfaction. Also it is obvious that females were interested in procedural justice ($\beta = .436$; $P = .000$), followed by interactional justice ($\beta = .345$; $P = .000$) and finally distributive justice ($\beta = .130$; $P = .028$).

Considering regression analysis, it is apparent that gender mediates the effect of justice dimensions on service recovery effectiveness. Distributive justice is important for males compared to females; this is consistent with Foley *et al.*, (2005). This can be explained by that individuals conform to gender stereotypes (Vogel *et al.*, 2003), where males are characterized as masculine compared to females who are feminine. The masculine characteristic of males associated with assertiveness, independence, and rationality make them almost give more importance to advancement and earnings (Kolyesnikova *et al.*, 2009). In other words, males concentrate on the tangible outcome of the service recovery (Gruber *et al.*, 2009).

Procedural justice effect on customer satisfaction is stronger for females compared to males; McColl-Kennedy *et al.* (2003) had revealed the same findings indicating that females prefer considering their views during recovery process and to have the liberty to provide input, where males do not regard voice as important. Females concentration on procedural justice may be linked to their traits making them prioritize process-oriented (context) issues compared to males who prefer outcome-oriented issues (Ben-Ner *et al.*, 2004).

Similarly, interactional justice effect on females' satisfaction is greater than that on males, this copes with the notion cited by Clay-Warner *et al.*, (2013). Females attachment to interactional justice may stem from their femininity that is associated with relational and interdependent aspects such as considerateness, sensitivity, responsibility and caring (Palan, 2001). Earlier, Eckel and Grossman, (1998) had pointed out that females demonstrate an increased responsiveness to others behavior.

Conclusion and recommendations

The study was conducted to determine the relative weight of justice dimensions as a basis of the service recovery process from the gender point of view. Generally, previous studies indicated that gender tends to mediate the relationship between the elements of the service recovery process and customer satisfaction. Practically, the results of the regression analysis support the literature.

Practically, females are interested in how the property implement the service recovery process; they need more discussion during the service recovery process, favor those service providers with proper social skills, want to provide input, present their point of view and to be involved in the decisions. On the other side, males focus on tangible outcomes to handle service failure. Hence, handling service failures properly requires considering the characteristics of both genders, and employing the suitable procedures regarding customers' gender.

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الملخص العربي

تقييم عملية تصحيح أخطاء الخدمة في الفنادق المصرية طبقاً لجنس العملاء

سامح فياض

عثمان الصاوي

قسم الدراسات الفندقية - كلية السياحة و الفنادق - جامعة قناة السويس

تهدف الدراسة إلى تحديد الطريقة الأنسب لمعالجة أخطاء الخدمة من منظور الرجال مقارنة بالسيدات تحقيقاً لرضاء العملاء. هذا ويقصد بتصحيح أخطاء الخدمة تعويض العملاء بالاستناد إلى الأنواع الثلاثة للعدالة (عدالة التوزيع، عدالة الإجراءات وعدالة المعاملة)، تم الاعتماد على قياس أهمية تلك الأنواع من منظور الرجال مقارنة بالسيدات. صممت استمارة الاستبيان لتشمل جزئين؛ الأول خاص بتقييم مدى استخدام الفندق في علاجه لأخطاء الخدمة للصور الثلاث للعدالة، والجزء الآخر لتقييم رضا العملاء عن معالجة الفندق لأخطاء الخدمة. جمعت البيانات من خلال توزيع 500 استمارة استبيان على عملاء 20 فندقاً بمدينة شرم الشيخ من الرجال والسيدات، استرد عدد 361 استمارة صالحة للتحليل الإحصائي. استخدم برنامج SPSS الإصدار 22 لإجراء التحليل الإحصائي. أشارت النتائج إلى إختلاف آراء الرجال عن السيدات فيما يخص الطريقة الأنسب لعلاج أخطاء الخدمة؛ إذ انصب تركيز الرجال على تحصيل تعويضات مادية ملموسة علاجاً لأخطاء الخدمة (عدالة التوزيع)، حيث بينت النتائج أن تأثير عدالة التوزيع في رضا العملاء جاء عال بالنسبة للرجال مقارنة بالسيدات. أما بالنسبة للسيدات، فالتركيز انصب على (عدالة الإجراءات والمعاملة) أكثر من التعويض الملموس، الأمر الذي يعكس على رغبتهن في نيل قدر من الاهتمام، التعاطف، سرعة الرد، معرفة تفاصيل عن سبب حدوث الأخطاء والنقاش حولها، بالإضافة إلى الأمانة في عرض التفاصيل من قبل مقدم الخدمة. وتحقيقاً لرضاء العملاء بالفنادق؛ فالدراسة تساعد عبر نتائجها على تحديد الطريقة الأنسب لمعالجة أخطاء الخدمة عند الرجال مقارنة بالسيدات.