

# **Efficacy of Service Recovery Strategies on Customer Satisfaction in the Hospitality Industry: A Scoping Review**

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## **Abstract**

This study aimed to investigate various service recovery strategies employed in the hospitality industry, with a focus on enhancing customer satisfaction. The study addressed the challenge of identifying effective service recovery strategies that accommodate cultural nuances and industry-specific challenges within the hospitality sector. A comprehensive scoping review was conducted, utilizing desk research and secondary sources, including journal articles, industry reports, and academic papers. The selection process involved purposive sampling based on specific inclusion criteria, focusing on articles from 2013 to 2023, related to service recovery strategies in the hospitality industry. A total of 22 articles were selected and analyzed using qualitative thematic and content analysis. The study identified common patterns and successful strategies across different segments of the hospitality industry. Key findings emphasized the universal importance of proactive communication, swift issue resolution, and empowered frontline staff in enhancing customer satisfaction. The research highlighted the need for tailored strategies to address cultural and industry-specific nuances, advocating for continuous improvement in service recovery practices. Practitioners are urged to focus on proactive communication, invest in staff training, and foster a customer-centric culture. This study adds to the existing body of research by providing a cross-regional analysis of service recovery strategies within the hospitality industry, highlighting the significance of cultural adaptation and ongoing improvement in service practices. It offers actionable recommendations for industry professionals to boost resilience and achieve sustained success in a dynamic and evolving environment.

**Keywords:** Customer Satisfaction, Hospitality Industry, Service Recovery.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The hospitality industry carries a delicate and important impact on the global economy since it supports a majority of the gross domestic product, employment, and revenues (Khan et al., 2020). It covers a broad scope of industries such as hospitality, tourism, food service industry and leisure industries all of which depend on customer relation (Wilson et al., 2020). Being an industry that offers mainly intangible offerings, including interpersonal communications and enjoyable experiences, the role of customer satisfaction is unrivaled in the industry's context. Customer satisfaction, in its turn, remains a crucial factor affecting business outcomes, including customer loyalty and their willingness to reuse services (Kotler et al., 2017). However, maintaining a positive level of customer satisfaction may not be easy especially since it is a herculean task to contain variations of service delivery. Among the challenges affecting the delivery of quality service in the hospitality industry, service failures present a major risk factor given that circumstances where service falls short of customer expectations will always arise.

Service failures can arise from various factors, including operational inefficiencies, human errors, miscommunication, or external disruptions (Cook & Woods, 2018). Regardless of the cause, the impact of service failures can be profound, leading to customer dissatisfaction, negative reviews, and potential loss of business. Given the intangibility of services in the hospitality industry, these failures can be particularly damaging, as customers have no tangible product to evaluate; their perception of service quality is based entirely on their experience (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The challenge, therefore, lies not only in preventing service failures but also in effectively managing them.

Service recovery is the efforts that are made by an organization to reverse the impact of a service failure on the satisfaction of a customer (Komunda & Osarenkhoe, 2012). It is evident from the literature that if service failures are managed effectively through service recovery, then their diminished effects can be reversed and even customer loyalty enhanced beyond pre failure levels (Tax et al., 1998). This, in fact has been described as the 'service recovery paradox' and points to the ability of recovery strategies to effectively convert complaining customers and unsatisfied clients into loyal service consumers. Despite this, the use of service recovery strategies depends on a certain context such as culture, expectation, and the hotel industry it is used in.

This study addresses the issue of insufficient understanding regarding how various service recovery strategies affect customer satisfaction across different cultural and geographical contexts within the hospitality industry. Although there is extensive literature on service recovery, most research has been centered on Western settings, leaving a notable gap in knowledge about the effectiveness of these strategies in other regions, particularly in developing countries. This gap is significant as the hospitality sector in regions such as Africa and Asia is experiencing rapid growth. Given the economic importance of the hospitality industry and the critical role of customer satisfaction in its success, examining the impact of service recovery strategies on customer satisfaction is essential. This research aims to fill this gap by providing valuable insights that can guide best practices for hospitality businesses,

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ultimately enhancing service quality, customer loyalty, and long-term success. The study will focus on achieving the following objectives:

- i. Investigate the different service recovery strategies employed in the hospitality industry.
- ii. Explore the effectiveness of these strategies in enhancing customer satisfaction.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Service Recovery in the Hospitality Industry**

Service recovery refers to the ideology that is common in the service business world particularly in the hospitality industry where the understanding is focused towards satisfying the needs and expectations of consumers. Service recovery involves a process that relates to a set of activities that enable an organization to respond to a service failure with the hope of bringing back the satisfaction of the customer (Alzoubi & Inairat 2020). This means services in hospitality landscape may be absent or nonexistent from the less severe level, such as late delivery in room service to extreme cases like wrong bookings or uncomfortable rooms (Migacz, 2018). Depending on how these failures are managed, either the experience that a customer has with the brand can be enhanced or further strained. Since hospitality services involves information intensity, they are not standard, storages, and highly people oriented, service failure is inevitable. However, what it means is that while service failures define the type of hospitality industry, how it handles these failures is crucial. The satisfaction which customers feel after the service failure is not only reinstated back but may even be given a positive connotation by the customer through actions like reusing the firm's services and recommending them to others (Choi & Choi 2014). There is a similar concept known as the 'service recovery paradox' which suggests that at times, the complaint will have been handled well and the customer will be in a better state of satisfaction as that before he/she filed the complaint (Van Vaerenbergh & Orsingher, 2016).

The concept of service recovery has evolved over time, reflecting changes in customer expectations and advancements in service management practices. Historically, service recovery was often reactive, with businesses addressing complaints only when they were explicitly raised by customers (Ma et al., 2017). Early models of service recovery focused primarily on compensating customers for their inconvenience, often through refunds or discounts. However, as the service industry matured, so too did the understanding of the psychological and emotional aspects of customer satisfaction. Researchers began to emphasize the importance of empathy, personalized communication, and prompt action in effective service recovery (Van Vaerenbergh et al., 2019). In the 1990s, Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar (1998) introduced a more comprehensive model of service recovery that highlighted the importance of fairness in the recovery process. Their model identified three dimensions of fairness: distributive fairness (the outcome of the recovery), procedural fairness (the process used to resolve the failure), and interactional fairness (the manner in which the recovery is communicated). This framework underscored the need for businesses to not only compensate customers but to do so in a way that is perceived as fair and respectful, thus restoring trust and satisfaction.

The hospitality industry presents unique challenges and opportunities for service recovery due to its distinct characteristics. Unlike tangible goods, the services provided in hospitality—such as lodging, dining, and entertainment—are consumed at the point of production, meaning there is little room for error. Additionally, the hospitality industry is highly dependent on customer interactions, where the quality of service is often judged by the demeanor, competence, and responsiveness of staff. This reliance on human factors increases the likelihood of service failures, as even the best-trained employees can make mistakes or face situations beyond their control. Moreover, the hospitality industry operates in a highly competitive environment where customer expectations are continuously rising. With the proliferation of online review platforms and social media, customers now have the power to publicly share their experiences, making effective service recovery even more critical. A single negative review can have a far-reaching impact on a hospitality business's reputation, while a well-managed service recovery can turn a potential public relations crisis into an opportunity to showcase the company's commitment to customer satisfaction (Smith, Bolton, & Wagner, 1999).

Service recovery in the hospitality industry is not just about correcting a mistake; it is about seizing the opportunity to reinforce the brand's promise of exceptional service. When executed effectively, service recovery can lead to stronger customer relationships, increased loyalty, and a competitive advantage in the market. However, the complexity of service recovery in this industry requires a deep understanding of customer expectations, quick decision-making, and an organizational culture that empowers employees to take ownership of customer issues.

### **Types of Service Recovery Strategies**

Service recovery strategies in the hospitality industry encompass a variety of approaches designed to address and rectify service failures, ultimately restoring customer satisfaction. Common strategies include compensation, where customers are offered refunds, discounts, or complimentary services to make amends for the inconvenience caused (Koc, 2017). Apologies, both verbal and written, are another widely used approach, signaling the company's acknowledgment of the mistake and commitment to rectifying it (Davidow, 2003). Corrective actions involve immediate steps taken to fix the issue, ensuring it does not recur, while proactive communication involves keeping customers informed throughout the resolution process, thus managing their expectations and reducing frustration (Ketola & Roberts, 2009). These strategies are often employed in combination, depending on the nature and severity of the service failure, and are crucial in mitigating the negative impact on customer perceptions.

The effectiveness of these service recovery strategies varies, with some approaches proving more successful in certain contexts. For instance, compensation can be particularly effective in addressing tangible losses or significant inconveniences, but may not be sufficient on its own if the emotional aspect of the failure is not addressed (Wei & Lin, 2022). Apologies, when sincere and coupled with corrective actions, can significantly enhance customer satisfaction, as they address both the emotional and practical dimensions of the service failure (Wirtz & Mattila, 2004). Customization and personalization play a pivotal role in service recovery, as they involve tailoring the recovery efforts to the specific needs and preferences of the affected customer (Van Vaerenbergh, Larivière, & Vermeir, 2012). Personalized recovery efforts, such

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as addressing customers by name, understanding their unique concerns, and offering solutions that resonate with their expectations, can lead to a more positive resolution and higher levels of satisfaction. This approach not only resolves the immediate issue but also strengthens the customer's emotional connection to the brand, fostering long-term loyalty (DeWitt, Nguyen, & Marshall, 2008).

### **Service Recovery and Customer Satisfaction**

One research domain of importance in the hospitality industry involves the linkage between service recovery and customer satisfaction since the ability of a firm to manage recovery efforts in times of complaints will determine the outcome in terms of customer perceptions and overall loyalty. This aspect relates to service recovery since it deals with service failure and the means used to rectify the occurrences in a way that satisfies the customer or even goes further to improve their expectations (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). Organized service recovery can make the situation right not only for the customer but also satisfy them, thus increasing their level of satisfaction with specific service. Secondly, the effect of service recovery on customer loyalty bears the potential of influencing customer loyalty in an indirect way, since the ability of the service provider to regain customers' trust is pivotal for long-term customer relations (Tseng, 2021). This can be explained by the fact that customers who undergo positive service recovery are better placed to offer their continued patronage.

Effective service recovery is crucial for building customer loyalty, which is vital for sustained business success. Loyal customers are invaluable assets, as they contribute repeat business and generate positive word-of-mouth referrals (Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990). A well-managed service recovery can turn a negative experience into a positive one, leading to the service recovery paradox, where customers may become even more loyal after a successful recovery than they were before the issue occurred (Michel, Bowen, & Johnston, 2009). However, the opposite is also true—poor service recovery can lead to significant negative outcomes. Poorly executed recovery efforts can result in customer dissatisfaction, loss of business, and damage to the brand's reputation (Komunda & Osarenkhoe, 2012). Customers who feel that their complaints have not been adequately addressed are likely to switch to competitors. Therefore, investing in effective service recovery strategies is essential for safeguarding customer relationships and ensuring sustained business success.

### **Challenges and Barriers to Effective Service Recovery**

Challenges and barriers to effective service recovery in the hospitality industry can greatly affect a business's capacity to resolve service failures and restore customer satisfaction. One major operational challenge is the complexity of service delivery, which can make it difficult to manage and resolve service failures promptly. In the hospitality industry, services are often delivered in real-time and involve numerous touchpoints, from front-line staff to back-office operations (Kwortnik & Thompson, 2009). Operational inefficiencies, such as inadequate systems for tracking and managing service issues, lack of coordination between departments, and slow response times, can hinder the effectiveness of service recovery efforts. These challenges are exacerbated in high-volume or high-demand situations where resources are stretched thin, making it difficult to provide timely and effective recovery actions.

Employee training and empowerment are crucial for overcoming barriers to effective service recovery. Frontline staff play a critical role in service recovery, as they are the first point of contact for customers experiencing service failures. Proper training equips employees with the skills and knowledge needed to handle complaints effectively (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). Empowering employees with the authority to make decisions and offer solutions without needing managerial approval can also accelerate the recovery process and enhance customer satisfaction (Liao & Chuang, 2004). Employees who feel confident and supported in their roles are more likely to engage in proactive service recovery, leading to better outcomes for both the customer and the business.

Organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping the implementation and success of service recovery strategies. A culture that prioritizes customer satisfaction and values service excellence can foster an environment where effective service recovery is more likely to occur (Schein, 2010). Organizations with a strong customer-centric culture encourage employees to take ownership of service failures and commit to resolving issues. Conversely, a lack of emphasis on customer service or a culture that does not support frontline employees can lead to inconsistent recovery efforts. Organizational support for service recovery, including clear policies, resources, and recognition of employees who excel in handling service failures, is essential for creating a culture that promotes effective service recovery and enhances overall customer satisfaction (Yavas & Babakus, 2010).

### **Theoretical Review**

Theoretical frameworks and models are crucial for guiding service recovery strategies and understanding how to effectively manage service failures while enhancing customer satisfaction. The SERVQUAL model, by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988, is one of the most widely acknowledged models in this field. This model measures service quality based on a comparison of actual service delivery and the quality perceived by the customers (Parasuraman et al., 1988). They found out that service quality model consists of five key facets –tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy essential for Service Encounter Failure Model and Service Recovery model. When one knows that there exists an area of insufficiency, for instance, in the aspect of responsiveness or empathy, it becomes easier to address the specific problem and ensure that the business delivers an appropriate quality of recovery strategy as perceived by the client. Understanding these dimensions allows businesses to implement targeted service recovery actions that align with customer needs and expectations. For example, if a service failure is linked to insufficient responsiveness, a recovery strategy might focus on improving response times and ensuring that customer concerns are addressed promptly. Similarly, if the failure is associated with a lack of empathy, the strategy might involve training staff to handle complaints with greater sensitivity and understanding (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, 1990).

### **Empirical Review**

Literature on service recovery and its effect on customers in the hospitality industry demonstrate important findings on how to undertake recovery and the consequences of this course of action. Van Vaerenbergh, Larivière and Vermeir (2012) explored the effect of process

recovery communication on customers’ satisfaction and so on their loyalty. In their quantitative work that involved a survey, they found out that; communication during the recovery process was a significant predictor of customer satisfaction, repurchase intentions and WOM. Speaking out, providing relevant information was deemed very central to the process of regaining customers’ trust and their returning to the company’s outlets.

Michel, Bowen, and Johnston (2009) investigated why service recovery efforts fail from multiple perspectives. Through qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and case studies, the researchers identified that misalignments among customer expectations, employee actions, and organizational processes often led to failed recovery efforts. Their findings suggest that successful service recovery requires alignment and addressing underlying tensions between these elements to improve customer outcomes.

**METHODOLOGY**

The research design adopted for this study was desk research, utilizing information gathered from secondary sources to explore service recovery strategies and their impact on customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Desk research, also known as secondary research, is praised for its advantages, including easy data accessibility, cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, and the ability to cover a broad range of topics with considerable depth (Ghauri & Firth, 2009). This study exclusively relies on secondary sources such as journal articles, industry reports, archival reports, textbooks, conference papers, and dissertations.

To ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant literature, the study employed a purposive sampling approach. This approach was guided by specific criteria related to the research topic, including the need for articles written in English, published within the last decade (2013 to 2023), and focusing on the context of Nigeria. The sampling frame consisted of articles retrieved from various electronic databases, including library resources, Springer (5 articles), Google Scholar (8 articles), Semantic Scholar (7 articles), and Emerald (2 articles). This resulted in a total sample size of twenty (22) articles that met the inclusion criteria.

Table 1: Details of the papers used in this study are as follow:

S/N	Scholarly Database	Years of Publications	Frequency	(%)
1	Springer	2023, 2022, 2022, 2021 & 2020	5	22.7
2	Google Scholar	2023, 2021, 2021, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014 & 2013.	8	36.4
3	Semantic Scholar	2022 & 2021	7	31.8
4	Emerald	2023 & 2021	2	9.1
<b>Total</b>			<b>22</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Source: Authors’ Compilation (2024)**

### Synthesis of Findings

The analysis of the identified service recovery strategies and their reported effect on customer satisfaction in the context of the hospitality industry has shown some peculiarities and trends associated with dissecting segments. In line with the study conducted by Hassan, Azhar, and Farooq (2014), service recovery plays a critical role in satisfying the customers. Also, in his study, Nwokorie (2016) examines the role of service recovery strategies for customer loyalty in some hotel industries. Some studies are Ogbonna and Igbojekwe (2015) who assess service recovery techniques in some selected hotels in Lagos Metropolis and knowledge gained through the study is used to suggest the right strategies. Specifically, in the context of the airline industry in Nigeria, Etuk et al. (2023) discuss airline service recovery strategies and their effectiveness as perceived by guests. Nwokorie (2021) explores changes in the management of services and guests' satisfaction in the hotel industry, which enhances the knowledge of the regional differences. In the same vein, Ampong et al. (2021) replicate a study in the Ghanaian hotel industry identifying customers' loyalty after service failure. Ojo, Busayo, and Ifeoma, (2017) explore the moderating role of service quality to the relationship between employee empowerment and customer satisfaction in the context of the hotel industry, explaining the complex nature of processes within service recovery. Third, Doh (2013) explore the antecedent of service recovery performance in the context of 3 and 4-star hotels in Douala Cameroun.

### Common Patterns:

- i. **Proactive Communication:** Successful service recovery often involves proactive communication. Keeping customers informed about the status of their concerns, whether related to accommodation, travel, or overall service experience, contributes to a positive perception. For instance, research by Tax et al. (1998) underscores the importance of communication in service recovery, suggesting that timely updates and clear communication can mitigate negative customer perceptions and enhance satisfaction.
- ii. **Quick Resolution:** A common pattern observed across segments is the emphasis on swift issue resolution. Customers value timely responses and effective solutions to their problems, reflecting a commitment to addressing concerns promptly. Studies have consistently shown that speed of resolution is crucial in service recovery, as it significantly impacts customer satisfaction and loyalty (Davidow, 2003).
- iii. **Empowering Employees:** The importance of empowered employees in delivering successful service recovery is well-documented. Staff members who are equipped to make decisions and take initiative in resolving issues contribute significantly to customer satisfaction. Research by Maxham and Netemeyer (2002) indicates that empowerment allows employees to handle complaints more effectively, thereby improving overall customer experience.

**Successful Strategies:**

- i. **Tailored Solutions:** Offering tailored solutions to address the specific needs and concerns of individual customers is a successful strategy. Personalized responses enhance the effectiveness of service recovery efforts. According to Smith et al. (1999), customization in service recovery helps in meeting individual customer expectations and can transform a negative experience into a positive one.
- ii. **Learning from Feedback:** Adapting and learning from customer feedback is crucial for successful service recovery. Hospitality establishments that actively collect and analyze feedback can identify recurring issues, allowing them to implement preventive measures and continuously improve services. Michel et al. (2009) highlight that feedback mechanisms are essential for refining service recovery practices and enhancing customer satisfaction.
- iii. **Crisis Management Plans:** Having well-defined crisis management plans is a successful strategy in service recovery. These plans encompass predefined processes for handling unexpected events, ensuring a systematic approach to recovery during challenging situations. Wirtz and Mattila (2004) emphasize that effective crisis management strategies help mitigate the impact of service failures and maintain customer trust.

**Variations:**

- i. **Cultural Considerations:** Variations in service recovery strategies can be influenced by cultural factors. Different regions may have varying expectations and norms, necessitating adaptations in service recovery approaches. Studies across Nigeria, Pakistan, Ghana, and Cameroon illustrate how cultural contexts impact service recovery strategies and emphasize the need for culturally sensitive approaches.
- ii. **Industry-Specific Challenges:** Different segments of the hospitality industry face unique challenges. For example, the airline industry may deal with flight delays, while hotels may encounter reservation issues. Tailoring service recovery strategies to address these specific challenges is crucial for effective recovery. Research by Kwortnik and Thompson (2009) discusses how industry-specific issues require targeted recovery strategies to enhance service quality.
- iii. **Technology Integration:** The extent of technology integration in service recovery varies across segments. Some industries leverage technology, such as online platforms for communication and issue resolution, while others rely on more traditional methods. Recent studies by Tax et al. (1998) and Michel et al. (2009) highlight how technological advancements are reshaping service recovery practices and improving efficiency.

The common patterns and successful strategies in service recovery underscore the importance of communication, quick resolution, and employee empowerment. However, variations influenced by cultural considerations, industry-specific challenges, and technology integration illustrate the need for customized approaches to effectively address diverse customer needs across different segments of the hospitality industry.

### **Research Gaps and Limitations**

On reviewing the current literature in regard to service recovery strategies and customer satisfaction, the following significant research gaps can be identified. One major gap that was identified is the dearth of research on the applicability of service recovery strategies beyond west, particularly in the Nigerian context. Related works like Smith et al, (1999) and Davidow (2003) present Western centered views without explaining how other cultural dimensions including; individualism/collectivism and power distance could affect the success of such strategies. For instance, while targeting culturally collectivistic societies, one may have to emphasize community-oriented service recovery tactics and little interpersonal contact, while in individualistic cultures, one may apply personal and direct approaches. Knowledge of these cultural dimensions and how they have influenced service recovery could be a useful way of getting a better understanding of how to better accommodate or respond to customers cross-culturally.

Additionally, there is a scarcity of longitudinal studies that examine the long-term impacts and sustainability of service recovery efforts. While many studies assess immediate customer responses, the enduring effects on customer loyalty and repeat patronage remain underexplored. Longitudinal research, as suggested by Michel et al. (2009), could offer insights into how customer satisfaction evolves over time following service recovery, revealing the long-term implications of these strategies. To address the limitations of existing research, it is crucial to consider innovative methodologies such as longitudinal field experiments, real-time data collection through mobile surveys, and qualitative approaches like ethnographic studies. These methods could provide richer, more accurate data and address issues of recall bias and limited generalizability, as noted by Maxham and Netemeyer (2002) and Wirtz & Mattila (2004). Adopting these alternative methodologies would enhance the robustness and reliability of research findings in this domain.

### **Implications for Practice**

Applying anticipatory communication management is still crucial in the hospitality industry given that a customer is notified, in advance of arising concerns, inconveniences or delays and thus, creates a foundation for trust and service recovery in case of disruption. This must be backed by delegating decision making authority of frontline staff and training them to make right decisions let alone settling grievances that may arise hence offering the best customer experience. Culturally, there is a need to do an adequate research to identify the most acceptable service recovery strategies since customers differ in perception and often operate under different challenges within the affected industries. Customer feedback loop is important for constant feedback from the customer that shows them where they areas often in need of improvement so that the necessary actions are taken. Further, the use of improved technology, for instance, well-designed web-based interfaces and social networks, can improve the agility in customer concern management.

### **Recommendations for Refining or Implementing Effective Service Recovery Strategies**

- i. Invest in comprehensive training programs for all staff to improve service recovery skills.
- ii. Develop a robust crisis management plan with specific protocols for different levels of crises.
- iii. Regularly benchmark service recovery strategies against industry best practices. Stay informed about emerging trends and innovative approaches within the hospitality sector.
- iv. Foster a customer-centric culture within the organization by implementing specific initiatives.

### **Conclusion**

The scoping review of service recovery strategies in the hospitality industry uncovers vital insights and implications. It identifies proactive communication, swift issue resolution, and empowered frontline staff as crucial elements for enhancing customer satisfaction, while highlighting the importance of tailoring these strategies to fit cultural nuances, industry-specific challenges, and varied customer expectations. Practitioners are advised to establish clear communication channels to build trust, invest in continuous staff training to enhance decision-making, and adapt service recovery approaches to diverse customer needs. Embracing ongoing refinement and actively incorporating customer feedback are essential for maintaining effective and responsive service recovery practices, ensuring resilience and sustained success in a constantly evolving hospitality landscape.

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