

From Service Failure to Repurchase Intention: The Roles of Trustworthy Service staff and Service Recovery

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ABSTRACT: *Based on previous work suggestion, trust is critical in assisting exchange relationships, the purpose of this study was to analyse the relationship between Service Failure, Trustworthy Service Staff, and Service Recovery on Repurchase Intention of restaurants operations.*

In this quantitative study, Data collection was carried out through an online questionnaire with snowball sampling system method results in 316 valid respondents. SPSS MACRO PROCESS was used to determine the mediating effects of constructs. Results indicate that the service failure could leads to repurchase intention, but when Trustworthy Service Staff or Service Recovery was shown in scene, customers' repurchase intention is influenced. When post-service failure meets Trustworthy Service Staff to Service Recovery process are involved, customers' repurchase intention could be significantly raised.

KEY WORD: *Service Failure, Repurchase Intention, Trustworthy Service Staff, Service Recovery,*

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I. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Business owners increasingly view customer switching behavior as complex, requiring a clear understanding of the factors influencing repurchase intentions for previously abandoned products. Effectively managing this behavior involves clarifying the key factors that motivate customers to reconsider their choices. Both switching barriers and inducements shape customer perceptions, and their simultaneous presence is crucial in understanding customers' repurchase decisions (Ngobo, 2004). The absence of either factor can lead to bias when forecasting customers' behavior and resolved in ineffective managerial decisions. Thus, balancing the consideration of barriers and inducements are essential for accurate forecasting of customer behavior and strategic decision-making. As a result, it's important to consider both switching barriers and incentives when predicting customer behavior and creating effective business strategies. (Chuah et al. (2017). Thus, identifying the factors that influence service quality, which drive customer satisfaction and promote customer repurchase intention, has become a central area of interest for researchers and industry professionals.

Due to the unique characteristics of services, such as intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and variability (Regan, 1963), even well-performing service providers are not immune to service failures (Choi, Mattila, & Bolton, 2021). Service failure refers to any objective or subjective flaws or issues that arise during the service delivery process, resulting in actual or perceived losses for the customer (Hess et al., 2003; Holloway & Beatty, 2003), which means service failure occurs when a service provider fails to meet the customer's expectations or special needs or delivers inappropriate tangible or intangible products (Hoffman & Bateson, 1997; Lewis & McCann, 2004). Therefore, effectively managing service failures is of critical importance for service providers.

The importance of customer retention is underlined by the fact that acquiring new customers is substantially more costly than maintaining relationships with existing ones (Furman, Diamant, & Kristal, 2021). Kumar & Shah (2004) further explore strategies for sustaining customer loyalty, noting its direct impact on repurchase intention, and underscore the significance of retention strategies in maintaining long-term customer relationships.

When incompetent services occur, the service recovery strategy performed by the firm impacts the future repurchase intentions of the customer. McDougall and Levesque (1998) indicated that no single recovery strategy could affect across all situations. When service floss occurred, assistance plus compensation was most effective in retaining customers. A well-executed and efficient service recovery process not only resolves the immediate issue but also likely to enhance customer loyalty and improve the overall perception of the

business. In the context of commercial friendships, developing marketing relationship between service providers and clientele is important, and trust is critical in facilitating exchange relationships in the service industry (Moorman, Deshpande & Zaltman (1993); Amoako, Caesar, Dzogbenuku, & Bonsu, 2023) including individual, interpersonal, and organisational relationships.

Peppers and Rogers (1997) famously stated, "If you can reduce customer churn rate by 5%, profits will increase by 100%." Building on this foundational concept, this study investigates the factors associated with service failure to repurchase intention. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the mediating effect of service failure on customers' repurchase intention through the mediation of trustworthy quality and efficient service recovery of mid-price restaurants. The focus is to understand how to drive repurchase intention with taken action.

1.2 Research Objectives

This study was aimed to identify the relationship between trustworthy service staff and service recovery variables on the impact of service failure to repurchase intention.

1.3 Research Methodology and Data Analysis

Service Failure

Service failures are common in restaurant operations and are generally regarded by customers as negative experiences. Hoffman, Kelley, and Rotalsky (1995) defined service failure as an outcome mistake (e.g., uncooked, burnt, tasteless, etc.) or error that occurs in the delivery of the service (e.g., lack of support or assistance, extended wait times, rude staff, etc.). When service providers fail to deliver the required services, deviations from standard operating procedures, delays in service delivery, or providing core services that fall below customer expectations are all examples of service failures (Bitner et al., 1990).

However, these failures do not inherently lead to customer anger. The emotional response to a service failure, particularly anger, is not automatic and may be influenced by various factors, suggesting that service failures may or may not trigger such emotional reactions. That is, a customer may be angry for many different reasons. To understand the causes of customer anger, service providers should first examine the key types of service failures that may trigger such emotional responses. In cases of high-severity service failures, as opposed to those of low severity, distributive injustice—specifically the absence of compensation—was identified as having a more pronounced impact on retaining customers (Zou & Migacz, 2022).

Trustworthy in Service Staff

The role of service staff in a service context has received limited attention. In service contexts, relationship quality is characterized by long-term commitments and an on-going exchange of interactions between the service provider and service receiver. Such long-term commitments can assist in reducing transaction costs and alleviating the uncertainty associated with future benefits (Lovelock, 1983). In the context of relationship quality, Crosby et al. (1990) suggest that relationship quality, defined by satisfaction with trust in a salesperson, is enhanced through the perceived proficiency and expertise of the salesperson. If a loss of trust leads to declining sales and customers, restoring trust may become essential for maintaining profitability and customer loyalty (Mallalieu, 2005). Research suggests that trust may either strengthen or diminish over time; however, its foundation is established during the initial sales interaction and is influenced by the salesperson's verbal and nonverbal cues (Babin, Griffin, & Boles, 2004). That is, trustworthy quality responses presented by service staff during service encounters may impact maintaining long-term customer relationships. In e-commerce online shopping, E-trust also shows a positive and significant effect on repurchase intention (Prahawian & Purba, 2021). Also, a recent study shows that trust restoration tactics are becoming strategic priorities in managing service failure (Raza, Tsotsou, Sarfraz, & Ishaq, 2023). Hence, food service operator should demonstrate explicit marketing strategies to ease the concerns and desires of their clientele and establish company's credibility.

Service Recovery

Service recovery, a fundamental component of the organisation's service operations, typically refers to the measures undertaken by a service provider in response to customer complaints (Grönroos, 1988). Several studies have previously employed specific categories to enhance the understanding of service recovery strategies, including examining types of service failure (Craighead, Karwan, & Miller, 2004), types of restaurant settings (i.e., casual, fast-food, and fine dining) (Zou & Migacz, 2022), and nationality of customers (Mueller, Palmer, Mack, & McMullan, 2003). Slow resolution of speed in service recovery was found to have a stronger impact on word-of-mouth intentions in quick-service restaurants than in full-service establishments. Also, Migacz (2018) pointed out that in a fine-dining restaurant, servers' friendliness is crucial to customers, whereas in a casual/quick-service restaurant setting, speed of service and cost of the food are accounted.

Prompt service recovery is important in gaining customer loyalty when an unfavourable service occurs. Shams et al. (2021) reveal a positive relationship between service recovery and outcome favourability, which are positively influenced by satisfaction with service recovery and customer loyalty and satisfaction with service recovery has a significant and favourable impact on customer loyalty. Service recovery directly impacts customer satisfaction and indirectly affects customer loyalty through the mediating role of customer satisfaction and corporate image (Gustafsson, 2009; Zaid, Palitati, Madjid, & Bua, 2021). Satisfied service recovery and outcome favourability, in conjunction with service recovery and customers' behavioural intentions, have received limited scholarly attention despite their considerable relevance, particularly within chained restaurant operations.

Repurchase Intention

When a problematic service occurs, the recovery strategy carried out by the organization impacts the customer's future revisit intentions. It has been proposed that customers engage in long-term commitments can reduce transaction costs and mediate the vagueness associated with future paybacks (Cuypers, Hennart, Silverman, & Ertug, 2021). Loyalty and repurchase/repurchase intent indicate a strong positive relationship (Curtis, Abratt, Rhoades, & Dion, 2011) when service recovery was satisfied by customers.

Successful service exchange episodes have the potential to foster long-term buyer-seller relationships, contingent upon their effective management from both the buyer's and seller's perspectives. Many researchers have evaluated the importance and identified the direct significance impact as a mediator of trust in E-commerce online shopping on repurchase intentions (Gefen, Benbasat, & Pavlou, 2008; Sun & Moon, 2024).

Whether service exchange episodes happen in an e-commerce online shopping or a restaurant, trust is critical in influencing repurchase intention (Sullivan & Kim, 2018). When customers are satisfied with a product or service, their likelihood of making future purchases—repurchase intention—increases significantly. By cultivating long-term customer loyalty, firms can minimize acquisition costs while maximizing customer lifetime value (Kumar & Shah, 2004). As a key consequence of service recovery and trust in service episodes, repurchase intention is a critical metric in evaluating the success of customer retention strategies. Businesses that prioritize customer retention through initiatives such as diminishing service failures, enhancing service quality, delivering expected experiences, and fostering strong customer relationships are better positioned to encourage repeat purchases.

Based on the foregoing discussions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Service Failure has a positive impact on Trustworthy Service Staff.

H2: Service Failure has a positive impact on Service Recovery.

H3: Trustworthy Service staff has a mediate impact on Service Failure to Service Recovery.

H4: Service Recovery has a positive impact on Repurchase Intension.

H5: Service Recovery has a mediate impact on Service Failure to Repurchase Intention.

H6: Trustworthy Service Staff to Service Recovery mediate the effect of Service Recovery to Repurchase Intension.

1.3 Data collection and samples

This research employed a survey questionnaire method to facilitate model testing. This study was aimed to identify the relationship between trustworthy service staff and service recovery variables on the impact of service failure to repurchase intention. A random sampling technique was used, and an electronic questionnaire was prepared and distributed through Google Forms, which enabled participants to access the questionnaire online efficiently. The results were available with no delay. All constructs were restrained in a seven-point Likert scale response format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). A total of 316 valid questionnaires were collected. Participants were offered no monetary incentives or encouragement to ease the risk of socially desirable responses.

The focus of this study was to assess the extent to which the service provider's failure affected the future repurchase intentions through their trustworthy service staff and service recovery actions. Service Failure was measured using a scale of 2 lower-level constructs, adopted from Hoffman, Kelley, and Rotalsky (1995) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$). This construct was modelled as a reflective-formative construct containing three lower-order reflective constructs. Next, Service recovery scale from Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar (1998) was adopted. There are two lower-order reflective constructs (Cronbach's $\alpha = .65$). The Trustworthy service staff was measured using a scale adapted from Crosby, Evans, & Cowles (1990). It was modelled and contains one lower-order reflective construct (Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$). Lastly, the Repurchase intention scale was measured by one single construct adopted from Cardozo (1965) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$).

Results:

1. Measurement model assessment of correlation

The measurement model assessed 4 individual constructs through correlation analysis, and the results are shown as in Table 1.

The relationship among these 4 lower-level constructs was tested, and their means are as follows: service failure (5.69), trustworthy service staff (6.00), service recovery (5.52), and repurchase intention (5.79). The results indicate there is a significant difference in the mean between them. In addition, the results also indicate a significant positive correlation between the four constructs: Service Failure, Trustworthy Service Staff, Service Failure, and Repurchase Intention. Service failure and Trustworthy service staff have a low-level correlation ($r = .312, p < .01$). Service failure and Service recovery have a low-level correlation ($r = .390, p < .01$). Trustworthy service staff highly correlated with Service recovery ($r = .364, p < .001$). Trustworthy Service staff and Repurchase Intension are highly correlated ($r = .518, p < .01$). Service recovery and Repurchase Intension have a high correlation ($r = .617, p < .01$). The lowest correlation coefficient in this study lies on Service failure and Repurchase intension ($r = .247, p < .01$). Hypothesis 1, 2, 3, and 4 are supported.

AVE for SF, TSS, SR, and RI was 0.78, 0.84, 0.84, and 0.84, indicating acceptable convergent validity. Each construct's square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) surpassed its highest inter-construct correlation, confirming satisfactory discriminant validity (Ab Hamid, Sami, & Sidek, 2017).

Table 1. Mean, SD, correlation coefficient, and AVE (N=316)

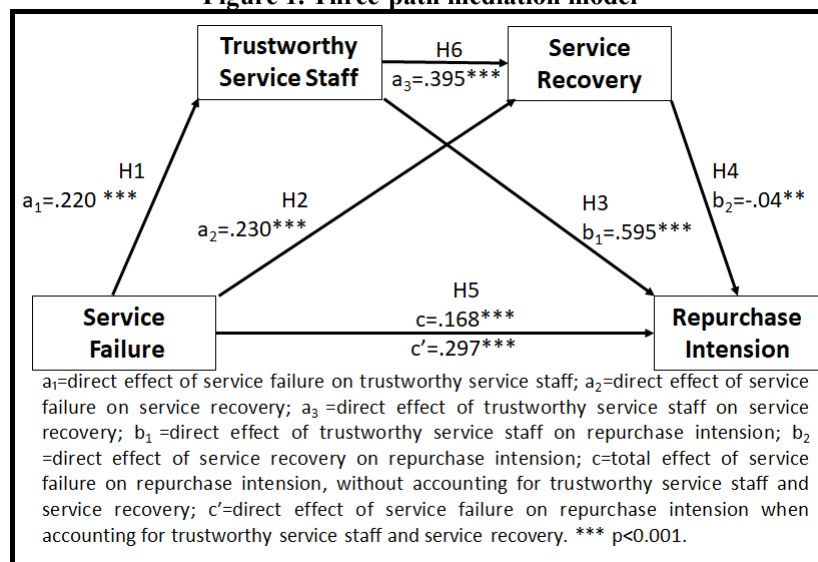
Construct	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	AVE	1	2	3	4
1. SF	5.69	0.75	0.75	.61	0.78			
2. TSS	6.00	0.69	0.66	.71	0.312**	0.84		
3. SR	5.52	0.99	0.65	.70	0.390**	0.364***	0.84	
4. RI	5.79	0.83	0.64	.71	0.247**	0.518**	0.617**	0.84

Notes: SF=Service Failure; TSS=Trustworthy service staff; SR=Service Recovery; RI=Repurchase Intension
 ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

2. Serial mediation analysis

After finding evidence of an association among service failure, trustworthy service staff, service failure, and repurchase intention, a serial mediation analysis was performed according to the suggestions of Hayes (2013) using SPSS PROCESS 3.0 MACRO. Model 6 was adopted to test the serial mediation effect and the interaction of each factor. The results are presented in Figure 1 and Table 2.

Figure 1. Three-path mediation model



The indirect effect of service failure on repurchase intention was significant ($ab = 0.13$, $SE = 0.04$, $CI = 0.07$ to 0.21). The indirect effect of service failure on repurchase intention via trustworthy service staff was significant ($a_1b_1 = 0.04$, $SE = 0.03$, $CI = 0.07$ to 0.20). The indirect effect of service failure on repurchase intention via service recovery was also significant ($a_2b_2 = 0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, $CI = 0.03$ to 0.04). The indirect effect of service

failure on repurchase intention was also significant through trustworthy service staff and service recovery ($a_1a_3b_2=0.003$, $SE=0.01$, $CI=0.01$ to 0.02).

The nonparametric percentile Bootstrap method for bias correction was selected, the sample size was set to 5,000, the confidence level of the confidence interval was set to 95%, and the grouping conditions were the mean and the mean plus or minus one standard deviation to empirically test the intervening role of trustworthy service staff and service failure on service failure and repurchase intension.

In a serial mediation model with two mediators (e.g., trustworthy service staff and service recovery), it is possible to estimate the total effect, direct effect, and total indirect effect. This model also allows for examining three specific indirect effects, which can be compared to assess the unique contributions of each mediating pathway. Control variables were excluded from this study because their inclusion should be based on a solid theoretical foundation rather than just on empirical correlations found in prior research. Hypothesis 5 and Hypothesis 6 are supported.

Table 2. Serial mediation analyses (N=316)

Effect	b	SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
ab	.13	.04	.06	.21
a_1b_1	.04	.03	.07	.20
a_2b_2	.01	.02	.03	.04
$a_1a_3b_2$.003	.01	.01	.02

Bootstrap sample size=5000. a and b represent unstandardized regression coefficients. a_1b_1 =specific indirect effect through Trustworthy service staff; a_2b_2 =specific indirect effect through service recovery; $a_1a_3b_2$ =specific indirect effect through trustworthy service staff and service recovery. LLCI, lower limit of CI; ULCI, upper limit of CI.

1.4 Findings and Interpretation:

The proposed model examined the relationships between four key constructs: service failure, trustworthy service staff, service recovery, and repurchase intention. The findings revealed significant differences in the mean scores of these constructs, indicating that participants assigned varying levels of importance or satisfaction to each dimension. Additionally, the relationships between the dependent and independent variables in the model were supported.

1. Trustworthiness of service staff mediate the effects of service failure on customers' repurchase intentions.

The trustworthy service staff plays a crucial role in mediating the effects of service failure on customers' future purchase intentions. This aligns with literature in relationship marketing, which consistently demonstrates that trust is a fundamental antecedent to customer loyalty (Sun & Lin, 2010; Baker & Kim, 2018). Specifically, trust performed by service staff is a significant determinant in shaping loyalty intentions. Research result noted by Yim, Tse, and Chan (2008) further underscores that customer trust influences their loyalty intentions and enhances their overall satisfaction and likelihood of repeat purchases.

In addition, Palmatier et al. (2009) also suggest that positive emotional responses provided from service providers, such as a trustworthy service staff can improve the perception of the service provider's trustworthiness. When customers perceive service staff as dependable and honest, even in the face of service failures, they are likelier to exhibit loyalty behaviours, such as repurchasing and recommending the service. Trust can act as a buffer, reducing the adverse effects of service failures on customer repurchase intentions.

2. Effective service recovery strategies can buffer the negative impact of service failure on repurchase intentions.

Smith and Bolton (1998) conducted a study to evaluate a service recovery scenario in a restaurant or hotel; the findings reveal that a single recovery attempt with compensation can significantly influence customers' overall satisfaction with the service provider. This, in turn, substantially affects their intentions to revisit the service provider in the future. Given the established correlation between service recovery and repurchase intentions, organization must focus on the practices that foster the effectiveness of their service recovery performance (Azemi, Ozuem, Howell, and Lancaster, 2019). Customers' willingness to return is often shaped more by how a service failure is handled than by the failure itself.

3. Trustworthy service staff and service recovery efforts shape repurchase intentions after service failure.

This study revealed the multi-faceted role of trustworthy service staff and service recovery efforts in sculpting customer behavior post-service failure. The fact that all these indirect paths were significant emphasizes that service failure does not solely influence repurchase intention through direct means but is mediated by these key elements. The results showed that service failure does not solely influence repurchase intention through direct means. However, the significant positive correlations among the constructs indicate they are interrelated. There was a stronger correlation between trustworthy service staff and service recovery,

indicating that customers who perceive the service staff as trustworthy are more likely to believe recovery efforts will be effective.

The highest correlations were observed between trustworthy service staff and repurchase intention, as well as between service recovery and repurchase intention, suggesting that customers who trust the service staff and feel the service recovery efforts are successful are more likely to repurchase. However, the lowest correlation was found between service failure and repurchase intention, indicating that while service failures affect perceptions of service quality, they have a weaker direct impact on the intention to repurchase.

Oliver (1999) discusses how satisfaction and loyalty influence customer behaviors such as repurchase intention, underlining the importance of customer retention. Grewal, Roggeveen, and Tsiros (2008) stated that compensation is a powerful service failure recovery tool when it frequently occurs, and the service provider is liable. While putting service recovery into action, management must consider not only customer satisfaction but should also include organizational strategies such as fair compensation, dedicated management involvement, and effective leadership approaches (Murphy et al., 2014). Customer retention presents an opportunity for organizations to develop possible repurchase intentions. When service encounters, practices such as dismissing customer complaints, offering unhelpful compensation, or failing to address the core cause of the issue can significantly weaken the impact of recovery efforts, potentially leading to diminished customer loyalty. In contrast, well-executed recovery processes prioritizing trustworthy service staff and customer-centric recovery solutions can renovate a negative experience into a positive one, fostering long-term customer retention and improving repurchase intentions.

Conclusion

Service failure does not directly determine repurchase intention. The findings contribute to the existing literature by highlighting that while satisfaction with service recovery is crucial, customers' trust in service staff plays a more significant role than service recovery efforts in driving repurchase intentions, especially when customers experience service failure and organizational recovery actions.

Although service failure is significant, its direct effect on repurchase intention appears to be less substantial, likely due to the moderating role of trustworthy service staff and efforts of service recovery. Companies could benefit from taking care of their trustworthy service staff and enhancing recovery strategies to mitigate the negative effects of service failures on customer repurchase intention.

By focusing on these areas, organizations could rely on their frontline service staff to be committed by enhancing empowerment and manipulate relationship marketing strategies to encourage customer repurchase behaviours. Businesses can mitigate the negative consequences of service failures and maintain customer loyalty, as these factors significantly impact the returning intention of customers for future purchases.

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