

## Identifying a Comprehensive Theoretical Picture of Service Failure Concept

### تحديد صورة نظرية شاملة لمفهوم الاخفاق الخدمي

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Received: 29/08/2019; Accepted: 04/10/2019

**Abstract:** Much attention has been paid recently to the concept of service failure. In light of this, the paper is trying to provide a theoretical framework for all terms, which have a relation with the concept of service failure, because companies, which used to compete by marketing tangible goods, have now switched their competitive focus to the provision of unparalleled customer services, synonymously with service marketing, as a result, it has focused on how to improve a service providers performance (service encounter), and how to attract customers, especially with characteristics of services, and how they are conducted, it is to be expected that problems will occur, so that, in case of problems and to rectify them, it is necessary for service recovery to be conducted, and handling the customer complaints by the service provider.

**Keywords:** Service marketing; Service Encounter; Service Failure; Service recovery; customer complaints.

**Résumé:** Récemment, une attention particulière a été accordée au concept de défaillance de service où d'échec de service. À la lumière de cela, cet article vise à fournir un cadre théorique pour tous les termes liés au concept de défaillance de service (échec de service), parce que les entreprises étaient autrefois concurrentielles en commercialisant des biens, maintenant, elles se concentrent désormais sur le service à la clientèle d'une manière distincte pas comme les autres, ceci est le synonyme de marketing de service et, par conséquent elles ont concentrées sur l'amélioration des performances des fournisseurs de services et comment attirer les clients, notamment en ce qui concerne les caractéristiques des services, et avec la façon dont laquelle elles produisent, (des problèmes sont attendus) (les plaintes des clients), dans le cas où ce dernier se produirait et afin de le corriger, , il est nécessaire de prendre des mesures du reprise de service et de traiter les réclamations des clients par le prestataire de services.

**Mots-clés :** Marketing des services; Rencontre de service; Défaillance du service; service de traitement (reprise); réclamations clients.

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**ملخص:** مؤخرًا تم اظهر الكثير من الاهتمام لمفهوم فشل الخدمة أو الاخفاق الخدمي، وعلى ضوء ذلك تهدف هذه الورقة الى تقديم إطار نظري لجميع المصطلحات التي لها علاقة بمفهوم فشل الخدمة، لأن الشركات فيما مضى اعتادت على المنافسة عن طريق تسويق السلع الملموسة، أما الآن فقد حولت تركيزها التنافسي إلى خدمة الزبائن بطريقة متميزة لا مثيل لها، وهذا بشكل مترادف مع تسويق الخدمات، ونتيجة لذلك، فقد ركزت على كيفية تحسين أداء مقدمي الخدمات (اللقاء الخدمي)، وكيفية جذب الزبائن في ظل خصائص الخدمات، ومع كيفية انتاجها فإنه من المتوقع حدوث مشاكل (شكاوى الزبون ) ، لذلك في حالة حدوث هذه الأخيرة ومن أجل تصحيحها، من الضروري اتخاذ اجراءات تعافي الخدمة ومعالجة شكاوى الزبائن من طرف مقدم الخدمة.

**الكلمات المفتاح :** تسويق الخدمات؛ اللقاء الخدمي؛ الاخفاق الخدمي ( فشل الخدمة)؛ معالجة (تعافي) الخدمة؛ شكاوى الزبون.

## **I- Introduction :**

The ever growing competition and continuous increase in customer expectations and demands have made customer satisfaction and related constructs to be the main focus of research in service marketing. To overcome this tough competition, every organization is trying to improve efficiency, increase customer loyalty and build long-term relationships with their customers without sacrificing quality of service in other words make a perfect service encounter. As a result, many researchers have discussed in their papers various aspects related to how deliver their services without any mistake, and to make this true, it's should be tracking to the service failure, to avoid any negative emotion through service recovery strategies, to guarantee customer satisfaction, loyalty and positive word of mouth.

Customer complaining behaviour in service failure situation is very important, it's refer how service providers can handle a problem during the course of service recovery. Service providers typically engage in problem-solving actions intended to rectify these perceived service.

From what is said above, we can ask the following question: **what is the concept of service failure ?**

## **II- Service Marketing Framework;**

### **II.1. Service Marketing:**

Researchers interested in service marketing are beginning to understand what they are studying, but they are not yet clear how to study it. The service marketing literature generally has been concerned with listing the differences between

services and products. There has been little attempt to point out the implications for marketers in service companies and even less of an attempt to propose new concepts or approaches. (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985, p.99)

This section of the text focuses on each of these four unique characteristics that differentiate the marketing of services from the marketing of goods, by the following (HOFFMAN & BATESON, 2010, pp13-25):

**II.1.a. Intangibility:** is the primary source from which the other three characteristics emerge. Services cannot be seen, felt, tasted or touched in the same manner as physical goods can be sensed.

**II.1.b. Inseparability:** The inseparability of services reflects the interconnection among the service provider, the customer involved in receiving the service, and other customers sharing the same experience.

**II.1.c. Heterogeneity:** concerns the variation in consistency from one service transaction or encounter to the next. Service encounters occur in real time and consumers are present within the factory, so if something goes wrong during the service process, it is too late to institute quality-control measures before the service reaches the customer

**II.1.d. Perishability:** refers to the fact that services cannot be saved, their unused capacity cannot be reserved, and they cannot be inventoried. Unlike goods that can be stored and sold at a later date, services that are not sold when they become available cease to exist.

## **II.2. Service Encounter:**

Customer co-production of the end “product” is one major distinction between service-based and goods-based transactions. In service encounters characterized by high customer participation (e.g. haircuts, medical exams, education), customers are usually physically present to receive the service and often are called on to provide critical information that is necessary for effective delivery of the service. Some researchers have gone so far as to suggest that customers be conceptualized as “partial” employees of the organization owing to their co-production role. In highly participative services, outcomes emerge from the collaboration among service employees and customers, and the quality of the resulting service is at least partially dependent on the quality of the collaboration (Yen, Gwinner, & Su, 2004, p.9).

**Service Encounter** The model of service encounter evaluation relies on Shostack's definition of the term "service encounter" as "a period of time during which a consumer directly interacts with a service." Shostack's definition encompasses all aspects of the service firm with which the customer may interact—including its personnel, its physical facilities, and other tangible elements during a given period of time. (Bitner, 1990, p.70)

### **III- Service Failure:**

Even the best service providers produce errors in service delivery. One reason for these failures is the labor-intensive nature of many services, which inevitably leads to more heterogeneous outcomes compared to mechanical production processes. Service performance variability and failures also arise from the inseparability of service production and consumption, which prevents quality inspections of most services prior to delivery. Service marketers therefore have a large stake in understanding both the consequences of failure and how to provide an effective recovery, so that they can minimize customer dissatisfaction following a failure and thus retain the customer's business.

#### **III.1. Critical service incidents:**

Critical service incidents have been widely studied (e.g. Bitner, Hoffman, Zhu and Sivakumar) in the services marketing literature in an effort to find new ways to improve service quality. (Chung-Herrera, Goldschmidt, & Hoffman, 2004 , p.241)

Incident defined as an observable human activity that is complete enough to allow inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. A critical incident is described as one that makes a significant contribution, either positively or negatively, to an activity or phenomenon. (Gremier, 2004, p.66).

#### **III.2. Service failure:**

A service failure is defined as service performance that falls below a customer's expectations (Hess Jr, Ganesan, & Klein, 2003, p.127).

Service failure, or service breakdown, can be defined as service that does not meet customer expectations. There are numerous reactions customers may have to service failures, but the most commonly investigated are changes in satisfaction, emotive reactions (such as anger, displeasure, or remorse), and behavioral consequences (such as complaining or switching service providers). A

significant behavioral outcome of service failure relates to the repatronage of service providers. Long-term loyalty is likely to be affected by service failure, especially when there is a chance to change suppliers. (Agarwal, Mehrotra, & Barger, 2016, pp.31-32 ).

Customers evaluate services by comparing the service they perceive they have received (service performance) with their expectations of what they should have received. A service failure occurs when the service performance fails to live up to the customer's expectations.

A service failure could originate in a core-service problem such as unavailability of the service (no service personnel with the appropriate knowledge are available), exceptionally slow service, mistakes in the service (e.g., bank statement errors, order fulfilment errors, or online statement errors) . (McLelland & Goldsmith, 2014, p.4)

When service failures occur, the service provider's reaction can potentially either reinforce a strong customer bond, or change a seemingly minor distraction into a major incident. Given that improving a company's customer retention rate by 20 percent has the same effect on profits as cutting costs by 10 percent, it is imperative that managers carefully consider failure and recovery issues and have an established service recovery plan to overcome failures when they occur (Hoffman, Kelley, & Rotalsky, 1995, p.49).

The terms service failure and service recovery are also related in the literature to customer complaining behaviour and effective handling of complaints respectively. (Hardeep & Devi, 2013, p.212)

### **III.3. Service failure types:**

Service failures are common in the service industry, and it is difficult to prevent them completely. In the initial stages of service failure research, a method known as the critical incident technique (CIT) was employed to investigate different types of such failure and recovery strategies. Researchers in categorizing service failures into three types: employee responses to service delivery system failures, employee responses to implicit/explicit customer requests, and unprompted and unsolicited employee actions. CIT employed to divide service failures into two types: core service failures and service encounter failures. A core service failure is a mistake, an error in billing, or a more dramatic service deficiency, whereas a service encounter failure is a deficiency in service delivery,

for example, a staff member who appears uncaring, impolite, unresponsive, or unknowledgeable. (Chuang, Cheng, Chang, & Yang, 2012, p.258-259).

There are two different types of failure which are core and supplementary failures also known as outcome failure and process failure. The occurrence of an outcome failure is worse for the company since it is a core failure and implicates a higher risk of losing the customer when compared to a process failure. The outcome failure motivates the service provider to put more effort into the recovery than process failure. The outcome failure is where the customer does not receive the service paid for, whereas the process failure refers to a disruption whilst receiving the aforementioned service. (GİDENER ÖZAYDIN, 2016, p.492).

Bitner, Chung and Hoffman, identified three categories of service failures as (Dutta & Venkatesh, 2007, p.353):

- ✓ **Service system failure:** This occurs in core service which is inclusive of product defects (food is cold, soggy, contains hair etc.) slow or unavailable service, facility problem (cleanliness issues like dirty silverware, insect or rodent problems etc) unclear, guest unfriendly policies (like not accepting cheques or credit cards) and out of stock conditions like inadequate supply of menu items).
- ✓ **Failures in implicit or explicit customer requests:** This occurs chiefly when employees are unable to comply with the customer's individual needs like – food not cooked to order; or seating problems like – seating smokers in non-smoking section or lost reservations etc.
- ✓ **Unprompted and unsolicited employee actions:** This includes behavior of employees that is unacceptable to guests like – rudeness; poor attitude; wrong order delivered; order misplaced or never filled; and incorrect charges like charging customers for items not ordered or give incorrect change

### **III.3.a. Service failure types with technology:**

In the context of self-service technologies (SST), and incorporating to some degree online services, subject to an analysis of customer dissatisfaction, researchers (Meuter, Ostrom, Roundtree & Bitner) introduced the four-grounded service failure typology: technology failure, process failure, poor design, and customer-driven failure. These authors suggested delineations with examples of each failure type as follows:

- ✓ **Technology failure:** the interface of the medium fails to work and obstructs the use of services (for example, 'a broken ATM').
- ✓ **Process failure:** a failure that emerges after the customer has completed an interaction with a technological service medium. Most likely the customer will recognize the failure after some time has passed (for example, a customer has ordered and paid online for a product but has not received it).
- ✓ **Poor design:** a technological failure occurs (for example, on a website or with an ATM) because there is a lack of clarity in terms of how to use it, and there is a service design problem with the service itself, rather than with the medium (for example, a prolonged period is required for the money to be transferred from an ATM to a customer's account).
- ✓ **Customer-driven failure;** failures can occur when the customer is 'at fault' (for example, a customer does not recall the personal identification number required to make an online transaction) (Ozuem & Azemi, 2018, p.111).

### **III.5. Impacts of service failure**

Service failure has a various impacts on (McLelland & Goldsmith, 2014, pp.5-7):

- ✓ **Complaining Behavior:** service provided in a failed encounter influences future complaint intentions., dissatisfaction leads to customer complaining behavior that manifests in voice responses such as seeking redress from the seller, private responses (negative word-of-mouth communication), or third-party responses (taking legal action).
- ✓ **Negative Word-of-Mouth:** Word-of-mouth is defined as informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers (Maher & Sobh, 2014, p.225). Even if consumers do not leave a firm following a merger or a service failure, they may be inclined to complain to their friends and family.
- ✓ **Switching Intent:** Service provider switching can have a significant impact on a firm. When customers are lost, new ones must be attracted to replace them, and replacement comes at a high cost. Switching can result from three drivers (push effects, pull effects, and mooring effects). Push

effects include low quality, low satisfaction, low trust, low commitment, and high prices. Pull effects refer to attractive alternatives; whereas, mooring effects are personal inhibitors and facilitators (e.g., variety seeking).

### **III.6. Causes of failure:**

Weiner described causes of failure by their underlying causal properties: locus, stability and control. Locus refers to who the customer thinks is responsible for the service failure. Was the cause of failure related to the producer or the consumer? A second property, stability, refers to the dimension of permanence of a cause (will it fluctuate or be permanent). The third property, controllability, refers to whether the cause was volitional or non-volitional. That is, was there some factor beyond the control of the producer that caused the problem? (Charlene, 2001, p.482).

When consumers are offered an apology or are provided with the opportunity to express their concerns to a service representative that perceptions of satisfaction and fairness are enhanced, particularly when recovery outcomes are favorable. It's found that perceived service quality and customer organizational commitment were both significantly related to customer service recovery expectations (Hoffman, Kelley, & Rotalsky, 1995, p.49). customer-service provider relationships consist of different combinations of mediating constructs such as trust, commitment, social attachment, love of the product, or investment. These different combinations may affect how different customers respond to the same service failure. (Hedrick, Beverland, & Minahan, 2007, pp.64-65)

### **IV- Service Recovery:**

The true test of an organizations commitment to service quality is the way the organization responds to the service failure (Ogechi & Polycarp, 2015, p.59).

The service organization can recover poorly or recover quite well, which in some cases, can lead to higher service quality views than if the failure never occurred in the first place. In this case, the failure is not necessarily negative but can be remembered as a positive critical incident or success. Although every effort should be made to reduce the occurrence of service failures, they are still inevitable as many contingencies can occur that are outside of an individual or organization's control (e.g, acts of nature). Therefore, it is important to not only focus on service failures, but also to focus on service recovery - both satisfactory. (Chung-Herrera, Goldschmidt, & Hoffman, 2004, p.243). In other words, the



overall memory of the service critical incident will be positive or negative depending on the type of recovery achieved. (Chung-Herrera, Goldschmidt, & Hoffman, 2004, p.243). Service recovery includes the actions and activities that the service organization and its employees perform to rectify, amend, and restore the loss experienced by customers from deficiencies in service performance (Hess Jr, Ganesan, & Klein, 2003, p.129).

Why is service recovery so important? One reason is that service recovery may be a firm's "last defense" against customer defections. (Migacz, Zou, & Petrick, 2018, p.84).

Further, studies such as Miller, Iyer and Muncy express that depending on the type of service failure, the service recovery may be behavioural/psychological and compensatory in nature. The behavioural/psychological service recovery attempts to resolve service failure through expressing concerns for the consumers which comprise explanation, acknowledgement, assistance etc. whereas compensatory service recovery focuses on effective recovery from a dissatisfied state. (Hardeep & Devi, 2013, p.213)

#### **IV.1. Recovery Response Time :**

The response time of the service provider also plays an important role in post-failure outcome. A recent study on recovery dimensions has shown that in customers' eyes the speed of recovery is the first item on the agenda in the recovery context. As it was pointed out, the shorter it takes to address the issue at hand; the less damage will be inflicted upon customer satisfaction and loyalty, it was highlighted that the speedy responses have a greater chance to influence the customers' justice evaluations when the experienced service failure is less severe. Though receiving an effective recovery only yields satisfaction when it's received in time. A late recovery although the right type, is not considered very effective after all (GİDENER ÖZAYDIN, 2016, p. 496).

#### **IV.2. Service recovery paradox :**

Service marketing researchers have explored 'service recovery paradox'. It is based on the grounds that if consumers received excellent service recovery in response to service failure, it will lead to enhanced customer satisfaction and increased repatronage intentions that would not have been attained if they had not had a service failure or recovery experience with the service provider. If a service recovery paradox exists, firms should focus learning efforts on recovery. (Sabharwal, Soch, & Kaur, 2010, p.131)

## **V- Justice theory in service recovery :**

Customers often use their perceptions of justice to evaluate a service recovery attempt. Although justice theory has been widely applied in service recovery research, to describe customers' assessments of companies' recovery efforts, it has not yet provided explanations of how customers assess resource integration in service recovery processes. In service research literature, perceived justice typically comprises three dimensions: distributive, procedural and interactional justice.

- ✓ **Distributive justice** refers to the assignment of tangible resources by the company to compensate for the service failure, such as refunds or discounts. Companies can use compensation by itself or integrate it with other resources to co-create value in a service recovery situation; customers judge this compensation as fair/not fair or just/ unjust.
- ✓ **Procedural justice** refers to the perceived fairness of the policies, procedures and criteria used by decision makers to arrive at an outcome. These policies, procedures and criteria are also resources, which the company can use and integrate into a value package to compensate offended customers.
- ✓ **Interactional justice** refers to how a customer is treated during the recovery process, as manifested by the manners of the service employee and the communications between the service company and the customer. Employee service behaviours and communication skills thus are important resources that the company can use in the co-created service recovery (Xu, Tronvoll, & Edvardsson, 2014, p.1256)

**Table (1): Customers' role in service recovery**

<b>Core concept/role of customers</b>	<b>Main findings</b>
Recovery voice/joint decision maker	Giving customers a say during recovery results in higher perceived procedural justice and better recovery experience
Customer participation in service recovery/ participant	Customer participation in service recovery improves customer satisfaction with the recovery
Customer co-creation in service recovery/co-creator	Customer co-creation negatively affects customer satisfaction when customers see themselves as doing the work for the company
	Customer satisfaction is improved only when

Co-recovery/co-creator	the service staff initiate a co-created service recovery
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**The source:** (Xu, Tronvoll, & Edvardsson, 2014, p.1255)

### **V.1 Service recovery strategies :**

Service recovery strategy refers to the actions taken in response to a service failure. Recently, the service management literature has focused on diverse aspects of service recovery. Service literature indicates three types of recovery methods including symbolic recovery, utilitarian recovery and mixed recovery.

- ✓ **Symbolic recovery** stands for the recovery that does not yield an economic outcome for the customer and includes symbolic exchanges such as an apology. It is stated that process service failures require a symbolic service.
- ✓ **Utilitarian service recovery** is required when there has been an outcome (core) service failure since the outcome service failure creates an economic loss for the customer.
- ✓ **Mixed service recovery** represents the use of two or more of the above mentioned service recoveries. These recoveries may be on utilitarian or two symbolic and one utilitarian etc. (GİDENER ÖZAYDIN, GÜÇLÜOĞULLARI, & DEVECİ, 2015, p.31-32).

Besides that, recovery strategies should be composed of all or some goals, which are: regular assessment and updating, a practical, precise and balanced recovery plan having all the required factors, a cooperative service recovery process and attempts to gain support for the organization. The goal of SR is not only to solve problems in order to decrease negative results and maintain clients in the process, but also to achieve complainant satisfaction. An ideal recovery process tries to transform the negative excitement of complainants into positive ones. A significant point in SR is that service providers should not wait for a client complaint, but in fact they should recognise conditions that are potentially dissatisfactory for clients and try to eliminate them beforehand. (Doaei, Rajaei, Tavassoli, & Doaei, 2012 , p.88)

Successful service recovery has significant benefits. It can enhance customers' perceptions of the quality of the service and the organization, lead to positive word-of-mouth communication, enhance customers' satisfaction, and build customer relationships, loyalty and impact on profits. However, the extent of success may depend on: the type of service, the type of failure and the speed of response. (Lewis & McCann, 2004, pp.7-8).

## **VI- Customer Complaints Handling:**

Complaint handling refers to the strategies firms use to resolve and learn from service failures in order to (re)establish the organization's reliability in the eyes of the customer. Complaint data are key in quality management efforts because they can be used to correct problems with service design and delivery, which makes it more likely that performance will be done right the first time (Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998, p.61).

Why are customers reluctant to complain? Several authors uncover four reasons (Bamford & Xystouri, 2005, p.309):

- ✓ customers believe that the organisation will not be responsive;
- ✓ they do not wish to confront the individual responsible for the failure;
- ✓ they are uncertain about their rights and the firm's obligations; and
- ✓ they are concerned about the high cost in time and effort of complaining.

Effective resolution of customer problems and relationship marketing are linked closely in terms of their mutual interest in customer satisfaction, trust, and commitment. Complaint handling strategies are important particularly in managing customer relationships in service businesses. Challenges in managing quality, combined with the important role played by customers in the service production process and evidence that customer loyalty drives profitability, make complaint handling a critical "moment of truth" in maintaining and developing these relationships (Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998, p.60).

Overall, customer complaints to the seller can be beneficial to the firm as the provider has the opportunity to address the complaint and prevent defection and/or mitigate negative word-of-mouth to others. However, only about 5% of customers complain after a service failure

Information processing theory suggests that the negative information about mergers in general that is stored in memory can lead to more extreme reactions. For example, if a customer is already worried or angry because of the merger, a service failure may exacerbate the situation and lead to a more negative response from the consumer. (McLelland & Goldsmith, 2014, pp.5-6)

It should be recognized that customers are not always right. Customers cause 30 percent of service or product problems. Researchers suggest four possible courses of action for dealing with complaints (Francis, 2001, p.222). (see Table2)

**Table (2): Complaint handling**

Action	Scenario
Ignore them	Low cost, possible for transient clientele
Discourage complaints	Communicate that service/goods are non-refundable. Possible for low-priced goods.
Appraise each complaint on its own merit	Possible where customer supplier interaction discreet. Could be used to target only profitable customers or significant service failures
Encourage complaining behaviour	Satisfy all customers who complain. High-cost approach to encourage long-term loyalty among all customers.

**The Source:** (Francis, 2001, p.223)

## **VII- Conclusion:**

Research into services is growing rapidly, however, there are still unexplained phenomena that need to be investigated. A research, theoretical, identified that further knowledge was required into how customers react to service failures. An examination of this has identified that the concept of service failure, is a service doesn't exceed the expectations of customers, it's more than quality of service, we talked about loyalty, satisfaction, relation with the service provider and word of mouth.

Service failure is a negative event, it's impossible to avoid it, especially if we take in consideration the characteristics of service, as a result, it must be there are service recovery strategies, and it like a tool for a company to prove to their customers the ability to make them satisfied at higher degrees.

We have tried through this research paper to focus on the fact that the terms service failure and service recovery has become pervasive in all organs of the organizations without exception.

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