Understanding Hotel Service Failures

Subjects: Management

Contributor: Shuyue Huang , Lena Jingen Liang

Service failure is inevitable. Service in the hospitality industry involves multiple interactions between the service providers and customers, and a high risk of service failures accompanies these interactions. Although empirical studies on the outcomes and processes of service failures have been conducted in the hotel industry, the findings need more exploration to understand how different segments perceive service failures and the associated emotions differently. This study revealed the similarities and differences between groups (i.e., men vs. women and leisure vs. business) in reporting service failures. Different meanings of words that emerged from the text-mining results were also examined to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of the guest experience.

service failure   group difference   gender   hotel management   purpose of stay

1. Introduction

The development of global competition requires effective approaches to reduce failures and attain error-free processes in service industries [1]. However, errors are inevitable in the service industry [2]. Once failures occur, service providers must act to effectively offset customers' adverse reactions to prevent post-consumption customer dissatisfaction [3][4], passive recommendation behavior [5], increased switching [6], and decreased revenue [7]. An appropriate service-recovery mechanism allows service providers to alleviate these potentially adverse consequences and restore customers' positive attitudes and confidence. However, studies conclusively show that even with excellent service recovery, restoring customer satisfaction is not as promising as preventing service failure in the first place [8]. Thus, taking a proactive approach to understand how service failures occur and planning to prevent service from failing is of greater importance in sustaining customer satisfaction than focusing only on better service recoveries.

Prior research has categorized different types of service failures in the hotel industry. For instance, researchers have identified 26 service problems, which can be further grouped into six broad categories, including staffing issues (the most serious), as well as (in descending order of importance) security, food and beverages, check-in/out, room, and facilities for business and leisure guests [9]. Additionally, other scholars identified 50 keywords related to service failures, which can be clustered into eight aspects, including guest arrival and departure, room amenities, food services, variety of choices, service personnel, banquet services, general food and beverage services, and communication [10]. However, the existing studies either considered guests homogenous and thus mainly focused on hotel guests' overall service-failure experiences or used quantitative survey questions to measure how different segments evaluate the importance of service-failure dimensions. What is missing is an in-

depth analysis of how different groups respond to unsatisfactory hotel services, especially by examining guests' stories.

2. Service Failure and Service Recovery

Service failure has been explored in detail in terms of service recovery in service marketing literature. The literature has identified two types of service failures [11][12]: (a) while generating outcomes and (b) during the consumption process. Consumers who encounter the outcome dimension of service failure might deal with a third party, whereas those experiencing the process dimension of service failure deal with the service provider directly. Here, special attention is paid to the process dimension, which denotes that service failures happen during the consumption process of a hotel stay. This approach is in line with previous research, which identified that service failure occurring in the consumption stage contributed most to determining whether a customer would return or recommend a restaurant to others [13]. Therefore, understanding how service failures happen during the consumption stage is critical.

Earlier studies on service failures concentrated on categorizing different types of service failures [7][11][14], sources of failure [15], or the typology of problematic customers [16]. Later, scholars focused on exploring the consequences of service failure. They found that the inability to properly cope with service failure might result in consumer dissatisfaction [3][17][18], negative word-of-mouth behavior [5], increased switching behavior [6], diminished customer loyalty [19], and decreased revenue [7].

3. Group Differences in Hotel Services

Gender differences exist in many aspects of hotel studies, such as evaluating service quality [20][21]; selection of lodging accommodations [22][23]; customer dissatisfaction [24]; and more specific issues, such as sleep quality [25] and hotel room design [26]. For instance, one study showed that functional service quality (service-delivery efficiency) better predicts satisfaction and loyalty among men; however, women's satisfaction and loyalty toward brands are more likely to be influenced by relational service quality (guests' emotional benefits, beyond the core performance, social interaction between customers and employees) [27]. Another study examined the relationship between the five dimensions of service quality (i.e., assurance, reliability, responsiveness, tangible and empathy) and guest satisfaction toward hotel service delivery, and the results showed that empathy predicts satisfaction across two gender groups, tangibility only predicts satisfaction among male guests, and reliability and responsiveness predict satisfaction among female guests [21]. Besides, women and men report differently on sleep quality, although it is generally perceived that sleeping quality in hotels is not as good as that in the home. For instance, one study confirmed that individual differences exist among guests; more specifically, men, younger people, and guests with insomnia tend to sleep better than others [28]. However, when identifying factors that influence hotel sleep quality, another study found that the likelihood of women reporting better sleep quality was higher than their male counterparts [25].

4. Findings of Service-Failure Experiences

Significant differences in service-failure experiences were identified between female and male guests, as well as between leisure and business travelers. Women were more sensitive to affective feelings during a hotel stay, whereas men were more concerned with the experience of facilities/amenities. Leisure travelers demonstrated greater price sensitivity and were more likely to have issues with amenities and meals, such as breakfast service and the swimming pool. In contrast, business travelers were more concerned about business-related issues and the hotel's functionality, such as Internet speed and air conditioning. These results suggest that more diverse strategies must be implemented when providing service and recovering from service failures and be differentiated according to type of traveler.

The findings confirm that regardless of gender and travel motives, guests want a comfortable, warm, clean, quiet, and safe place to rest, with commonly mentioned issues across groups including cold, smell, and noise. Therefore, the first practical implication for hoteliers is that these common and tangible issues should be avoided through renovation and refurbishment. In addition, it is imperative to ensure that hotel service is perceived as worth the cost, especially when offering physical elements to guests. For instance, sleep quality can be improved by purchasing high-quality pillows and mattresses and providing regular maintenance and cleaning, which highly resonate with the brand standard. In addition, hotels can offer support to help guests reduce any possible sleep disturbances with interventions such as yoga class recommendations and eye masks with earplugs.

Regarding noise control, hotels need to ensure that all of the facilities work noiselessly, significantly reducing the noise caused by the HVAC, refrigerators, toilets, and bathroom sinks. Furthermore, soundproof walls can be installed between hotel rooms. In addition, room-assignment techniques can be implemented to alleviate noise; for instance, guests on a romantic trip should be placed on different floors than group guests who are part of a larger social gathering. Employees need to be more assertive when introducing the lobby and pool rules intended to curb uncivil guest behaviors.

Another imperative is to acknowledge group differences and to provide differentiated service based on customer type. For example, when dealing with female guests, it is important to make sure employee training programs are more focused on showing empathy, being positive, and showing respect, as suggested by the word "rude" in the results. For leisure travelers, it is essential to ensure that the conditions of using coupons are fully explained and that more realistic expectations are communicated in advance. Finally, to develop a structural relationship with business travelers, hotels can emphasize in-room technology amenities, such as high-speed Internet and universal power outlets, in marketing materials, as well as other membership-related benefits.

References

1. Zeithaml, V.A.; Berry, L.L.; Parasuraman, A. The behavioral consequences of service quality. J. Mark. 1996, 60, 31–46.

2. Hart, C.W.L.; Heskett, J.L.; Sasser, W.E. The profitable art of service recovery. Harvard. Bus. Rev. 1990, 68, 148–156.

3. Goodwin, C.; Ross, I. Consumer responses to service failures: Influence of procedural and interactional fairness perceptions. J. Bus. Res. 1992, 25, 149–163.

4. Karatepe, O.M. Customer complaints and organizational responses: The effects of complainants' perceptions of justice on satisfaction and loyalty. Int. J. Hosp. Manag. 2006, 25, 69–90.

5. Mattila, A.S. The effectiveness of service recovery in a multi-industry setting. J. Serv. Mark. 2001, 15, 583–596.

6. Miller, J.L.; Craighead, C.W.; Karwan, K.R. Service recovery: A framework and empirical investigation. J. Oper. Manag. 2000, 18, 387–400.

7. Armistead, C.G.; Clark, G.; Stanley, P. Managing Service Recovery; Cranfield School of Management: Cranfield, UK, 1995.

8. McCollough, M.A.; Berry, L.L.; Yadav, M.S. An empirical investigation of customer satisfaction after service failure and recovery. J. Serv. Res. 2000, 3, 121–137.

9. Lewis, B.R.; McCann, P. Service failure and recovery: Evidence from the hotel industry. Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. Manag. 2004, 16, 6–17.

10. Lee, M.J.; Singh, N.; Chan, E.S. Service failures and recovery actions in the hotel industry: A text-mining approach. J. Vacat. Mark. 2011, 17, 197–207.

11. Bitner, M.J.; Booms, B.H.; Tetreault, M.S. The service encounter: Diagnosing favorable and unfavorable incidents. J. Mark. 1990, 1, 71–84.

12. Hoffman, K.D.; Kelley, S.W.; Rotalsky, H.M. Tracking service failures and employee recovery efforts. J. Serv. Mark. 1995, 9, 49–61.

13. Namkung, Y.; Jang, S. Service failures in restaurants: Which stage of service failure is the most critical? Cornell Hosp. Q. 2010, 51, 323–343.

14. Pamela, P.; Kusumah, A.G.; Marhanah, S. Service failure and recovery at The Trans Luxury Hotel Bandung: An evidence from management perspective. Adv. Soc. Sci. Educ. Hum. 2019, 259, 9–12.

15. Johnston, R. Operations: From factory to service management. Int. J. Serv. Ind. Manag. 1994, 5, 49–63.

16. Bitner, M.J.; Booms, B.H.; & Mohr, L.A. Critical service encounters: The employee's viewpoint. J. Mark. 1994, 58, 95–106.

17. Hess, R.L.; Ganesan, S.; Klein, N.M. Service failure and recovery: The impact of relationship factors on customer satisfaction. J. Acad. Market. Sci. 2003, 31, 127–145.

18. Lu, Q.; Chung, H.C.; Chung, N. A study on the factors affect the technology satisfaction on AI based self-service technology service failure in hotel. In Information and Communication Technologies in Tourism; Wörndl, W., Koo, C., Stienmetz, J.L., Eds.; Springer International Publishing: Cham, Switzerland, 2021; pp. 123–127.

19. Ampong, G.O.A.; Abubakari, A.; Mohammed, M.; Appaw-Agbola, E.T.; Addae, J.A.; Ofori, K.S. Exploring customer loyalty following service recovery: A replication study in the Ghanaian hotel industry. J. Hosp. Tour. Insights 2021, 4, 639–657.

20. Juwaheer, T.D. Gender bias in hotel guests' perceptions of service quality: An empirical investigation of hotels in Mauritius. E-rev. Tour. Res. 2011, 9, 164–189.

21. Suki, N.M. Moderating role of gender in the relationship between hotel service quality dimensions and tourist satisfaction. J. Qual. Assur. Hosp. Tour. 2014, 15, 44–62.

22. Kim, J.; Kim, P.B.; Kim, J.E. Impacts of temporal and gender difference on hotel selection process. J. Hosp. Mark. Manag. 2018, 27, 711–732.

23. Sammons, G.; Moreo, P.; Benson, L.F.; Demicco, F. Analysis of female business travelers' selection of lodging accommodations. J. Travel Tour. Mark. 1999, 8, 65–83.

24. Salleh, M.Z.M.; Said, A.M.; Bakar, E.A.; Ali, A.M.; Zakaria, I. Gender differences among hotel guests towards dissatisfaction with hotel services in Kuala Lumpur. Proc. Econ. Financ. 2016, 37, 27–32.

25. Mao, Z.; Yang, Y.; Wang, M. Sleepless Nights in Hotels? Understanding Factors that Influence Hotel Sleep Quality. Int. J. Hosp. Manag. 2018, 74, 189–201.

26. Bogicevic, V.; Bujisic, M.; Cobanoglu, C.; Feinstein, A.H. Gender and age preferences of hotel room design. Int. J. Contemp. Hosp. M. 2018, 30, 874–899.

27. Sánchez-Hernández, R.M.; Martínez-Tur, V.; Peiró, J.M.; Moliner, C. Linking functional and relational service quality to customer satisfaction and loyalty: Differences between men and women. Psychol. Rep. 2010, 106, 598–610.

28. Pallesen, S.; Larsen, S.; Bjorvatn, B. "I Wish I'd Slept Better in That Hotel"–Guests' Self-reported Sleep Patterns in Hotels. Scand. J. Hosp. Tour. 2016, 16, 243–253.