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SERVICE RECOVERY STRATEGIES AND CUSTOMER PATRONAGE OF FASHION DESIGN FIRMS IN PORT HARCOURT

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between service recovery strategies and customer patronage of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt. The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between service recovery strategies and customer patronage of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt. The study identified two dimensions and measures: response speed, apology, revisit and customer referrals. Cross sectional survey research design was adopted. The population of the study is comprised of the customers of registered fashion design firms in Port Harcourt. 104 copies of questionnaires were administered conveniently to 26 registered fashion design firms in Port Harcourt. The findings revealed that response speed had positive and insignificant effect with repurchase intention and customer referrals, while apology had positive and significant effect on the two measures of customer patronage (repurchase intention and customer referrals). Therefore the study concluded that service recovery strategy development and implementation should be closely monitored and evaluated periodically to avoid non-performance. It was thus recommended that managers should identify several capabilities, their relative importance, and the processes for achieving good customer experience which when properly executed, will increase repurchase intention and customer referral. Fashion designers should endeavour to respond quickly to customers when there is service failure. Service oriented organizations that wish to implement these strategies (response speed and apology) to enhance their performance, need to communicate their strategies to all employees. The fashion designers should adequately train its staff in preparation for implementation of any strategy that impact on its performance. The management should as well maintain the quality service delivery which will contribute immensely to the growth of the firm.

Keywords

Service Recovery Strategies, Customer Patronage, Response Speed, Apology, Revisit, Customer Referrals



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Introduction

Customers occupy the centre-stage of every business; they are key assets to every organization. No business can be successfully operated and earn desired level of profit without paying keen attention to customers and their various tastes and preference patterns. The task is always there for business organizations to deliver excellent services that will lead to customer satisfaction and these have remained burning issues. However, most mistakes are made in the course of complaints because service providers are usually impatient and disrespectful to the customer. The long existence of an organization is firmly on its relationship with its customers. Drawing from this, Bhandari et al. (2007) noted that customer patronage is what justifies the existence of any business socially and economically. Continuous customer patronage depends on how satisfied individual customers are with the services of the respective service providers.

However despite how a service provider tries to deliver quality service to its target audience, service failure seems inevitable. When that happens customers become dissatisfied and may brand switch owing to disappointments. It is obvious that because of the human element in service delivery service failure is very certain to occur. But it is expected that service providers should have a contingency plan that is aimed at prompt service recovery. (Wang et al., 2011). Such service recovery strategies are expected to handle service failure and lessen its impact on customers (Casado et al., 2011).

It is now a phenomenon that customers are the drivers of firm's sustainability; when customers have positive post-purchase experience, the provider's stand a chance of gaining competitive edge over rivals. It is essential that fashion design firms must preach, implement and sustain activities towards customer patronage. This has become vital due to the fact that the benefits of satisfying customers are quite enormous. Service failure has become a permanent stay in the fashion design firms in Port Harcourt. Despite the numerous gains that are associated with customer patronage, preliminary investigation and observation have revealed that customers of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt have no trust in their various shops with regards to the following issues; excessive/hidden fees, poor service delivery, product delivery issue, design issue, bad customer service, personnel are very rude and non-understanding; thereby, resulting to overall service failure.

Given that these challenges highlighted and experienced, it is important that fashion design firms and the employees devise different strategies in order to win customers' confidence and goodwill. On this backdrop, it is recommended that fashion design firms should adopt measures like responding speedily to customers' complaints and be proactive to forestall other impending issues. Additionally, fashion design firms must always go or begin by apologizing to their dissatisfied customers, and so forth. On this premise it is believed that general adopting and application of service recovery strategies would serve as a reliable tool to boost customers' trust and then customer satisfaction.

Against this backdrop, so many works have been carried out on service recovery strategies and customer satisfaction in Nigeria (Budi & Galang, 2010; 2019; Amelie & Josefine, 2012; Anna & Paul, 2016, Kycong et al., 2020), but it appears that only few studies were carried out on the relationship between service recovery strategies and customer patronage. However, literature seems scanty as it applies to Port Harcourt and in fashion design firms in particular. Our point of departure therefore, is to fill the existing knowledge gap in marketing literature by developing a model which will provide evidence on how service recovery strategy influences customer patronage of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is simply to determine the effect of service recovery strategies on customer patronage of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt. Their objectives are to:

- I. Determine the effect of response speed on customer patronage of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt.
- II. Evaluate the effect of apology on customer patronage of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt.

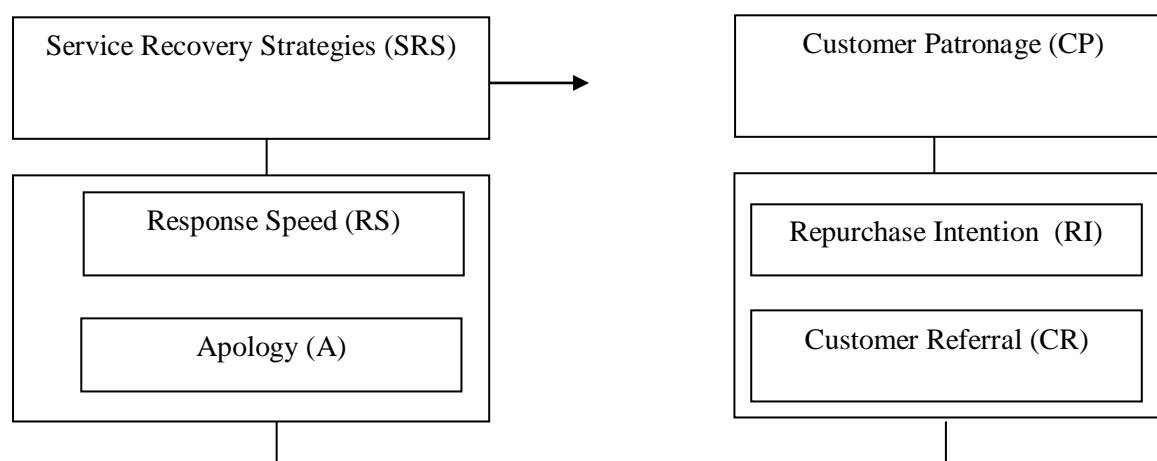


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the association between Service Recovery Strategies and Customer Patronage

Source: Adopted from Kycong et al.(2020); Amelie & Josefine(2012); Anna & Paul (2016)

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Theory of distributive Justice: The underpinning theory of this study is the theory of distributive Justice. The postulation of the theory suggest that when a customer is not satisfied as a result of poor services delivered by organisation, such customer is expected to be adequately compensated. The distributive Justice theory has three basic dimensions: distributive justice, interactional justice and procedural justice (Tax et al., 1998). Distributive justice describes the degree of fairness of an outcome (e.g. compensation) in response to a service failure by a service organisation. Interactional justice describes the interpersonal treatment which customers receive in the process of service recovery. On the other hand, procedural justice describes the fairness of the process which the service provider follows to resolve the service failure issue. In a situation where the customers perceive reasonable degree of fairness in the process adopted by the service providers they will certainly be satisfied and possibly engage in positive word of mouth about the service organisation.

Conceptual Review

Service Recovery Strategies

Efforts made by organisational managers to correct a service problem arising from service failure describes the concept of service recovery strategy (Igwe & Amue, 2014). To maintain an acceptable level of service quality, organisations are expected to develop and maintain appropriate service recovery strategies. Bonifield and Cole (2008) posited that it is crucial for organisational managers to take cognisance of actual and potential failures in advance, seek ways to correct them and monitor and implement improvements needed during the service delivery process. For this current study, respond speed and apology are the two dimensions of service recovery strategies adopted.

Apology: is a means whereby an organisation expresses regret that the customers did not derive the planned or promised service/benefit. It also expresses politeness, courtesy, concern, effort, and empathy to customers who have experience a service failure.

Respond Speed defines how fast the organisation responds to service failure with a view to recover the service.

Customer Patronage

Customer patronage describes the act of buying from a service provider or a seller by a consumer or customer. There are several factors that individual consumers usually consider before making a choice of what product to buy and where to buy it from. Service providers are expected to have good value propositions that will enable consumers to consider them in their choice list. In terms of this current study, the selection of a fashion shop for patronage could be the ability of the tailors to deliver on time, good styles, attitude towards customers, etc. In the traditional retail trade, Grewal et al. (2003) noted that retailers could influence customer patronage decisions towards their shops by having a desirable assortment of products. Other factors could be their choice of location (place) and being available at the time that customer need to make purchase and preferable price level. The decision to patronize a store usually starts with a set of characteristics or attributes that consumers consider important (Monica, 2008). The measures of customer patronage adopted for this study are repurchase intention and customer referrals.

Repurchase Intention: This defines the customers readiness to patronise the organisation after service recovery.

Customer Referral: This describes the customers expression of satisfaction after service recovery through positive word of mouth communication.

Empirical Review and Hypotheses Development

In a restaurant environment, Casado et al. (2011) investigated the effectiveness of service recovery in the quest to build long-term relationship with customers. Customer satisfaction after recovery had positive and significant effect on customers' trust. The effect of trust in terms of service providers on commitment and overall satisfaction was found to be positive and significant. Commitment on part of the service providers also had positive effects on overall satisfaction and behavioural intentions. In higher institutions environment, Steven et al. (2019) found that compensation and explanation had positive and significant effects on distributive justice, while apology had positive but insignificant effect on distributive justice.

In the context of internet companies in Egypt, Attia and Ahmed (2020) examined the relationship between empowerment of front-line employees and customer satisfaction when service recovery is completed with perceived justice mediating the relationship. The study which sampled internet company customers found a positive significant relationship between the empowerment of frontline employees and customer satisfaction after service recovery, a positive significant relationship between perceived justice with service recovery and customer satisfaction after service recovery. In addition, both perceived justice and service recovery had a mediating effect on the studied relationship.

In Johannesburg metropolitan area, Kruger et al. (2015) examined relationship intention and satisfaction following service recovery with perceptions of service recovery mediating the relationship

in the cell phone industry. The study found significant positive relationship between cell phone users' relationship intentions, perceived service recovery and satisfaction after service recovery. Also, perceived service recovery mediated the relationship between relationship intention and satisfaction following service recovery. Ogbonna, and Igbojekwe, (2015) in the context of hotel front office in Lagos found that there was no association between service recovery time and customer satisfaction and loyalty. Also, the receptionists were found to be the source of most service failures. From the foregoing, the following hypotheses were developed in their null structures;

HO₁: Respond speed does not have positive and significant effect on repurchase intentions

HO₂: Apology does not have positive and significant effect on repurchase intentions

HO₃: Respond speed does not have positive and significant effect on customer referrals

HO₄: Apology does not have positive and significant effect on customer referrals

Materials and Method

For the purpose of this study, cross sectional survey research design was adopted. The population of the study comprised of the customers of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt. Due to the vast volume of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt, the researcher concentrated on all registered fashion shops in Choba, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. According to Nigerian Directory, there are thirty-one (31) registered fashion shops operating in Choba (Nigerian Directory Release, 2023). The researcher selected twenty-six (26) fashion shops which were considered accessible. Convenience sampling technique was used to select these firms, for easy accessibility. Four (4) copies of questionnaire were allocated to each fashion design firms to give us a sample size of one hundred four (104) respondents and filled by the customers. These selected respondents are drawn conveniently. The Cronbach's Alpha value for response speed with four items was 0.888, while apology with four items was 0.852; revisit with four items was 0.849 and customer referrals also with four items have 0.799. Also, Pearson Moment Correlation statistical analytical method was used in the inferential statistics.

Results and Discussion

Questionnaire Distribution and Retrieval

It is clear that the overall response rate for the study was high as the desired (89.4%) response rate was achieved. Of the 104 questionnaires distributed, all 93 were retrieved. The average number of questionnaires retrieved by respondents of each fashion shops was 11, with the response rate ranging between 89.4% and 93.5%. As a result of certain observed incomplete entries as, some of the questionnaires were rendered not useable and so were not included in the study. 93 (89.4%) copies were retrieved while 11(10.6%) were not retrieved. Out of the 93 copies retrieved, 90(96.8%) were usable, and 3 which represent 3.2% were not usable.

Demographic Profile

From the selected sample, 53(58.9%) were female and 37(41.1%) were male respondents who participated in the study. The results reveal that women are the predominant managers of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt. With regard to age distribution, 23(25.6%) of the respondents were between the ages of 15 and 24 years, 25(27.8%) of the respondents were between the ages of 25 and 34 years, 25(27.8%) of the respondents were aged 35 and 44 years. 13(14.4%) of the respondents were 45 and 54 years, 4(4.4%) of the respondents were between the ages of 55 years and above. Therefore, the majority (81.2%) of the managers are between 15-44 years (young and middle aged).

In terms of marital status, 37(41.1%) respondents are singles, 26(28.9%) respondents are married respondents, 21(23.3%) respondents are divorced respondents while 6(6.7%) are widows. Table analysis revealed that 10(11.1%) of the respondents have O’Level certificate, while 25(27.8%) of respondents do hold OND/NCE certificates and 33(36.7%) of the respondents possesses B.Sc/B.A/HND certificates, 18(20%) of the respondents hold M.Sc./M.A certificates while 4(4.4%) of the respondents are Ph.D holders..

TEST OF HYPOTHESES

Hypotheses 1 and 2

Multiple Regression Analysis

DECISION RULE

If $PV < 0.05$ = Reject H_0
 If $PV > 0.05$ = Accept H_0

Tables 1-3 Multiple Regression Analysis showing the effect of effect of service recovery strategies and customer repurchase intentions

Table 1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted Square	R	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.920 ^a	.846	.842		.30162

a. Predictors: (Constant), Apology, Response Speed

Table 2 ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	44.370	2	22.185	243.856	.000 ^b
	Residual	8.097	89	.091		
	Total	52.467	91			

a. Dependent Variable: Repurchase Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Apology, Response Speed

Table 3 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.317	.265		1.199	.234
	Response Speed	.066	.083	.048	.800	.426
	Apology	.847	.057	.885	14.876	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Repurchase Intention

For this study, regression analysis was performed to predict the level of customers' repurchase intentions based on two independent factors of service recovery strategies. The two independent factors/dimensions of service recovery strategies are: response speed and apology.

The Table 1 shows that R is .920, R Square is .846 and adjusted R square is .842. This is an indication that 84.6% of the variance in customer repurchase intentions can be explained by the changes in independent variables of service recovery strategies of fashion designers. As a general rule, this model is considered as being a 'good fit' as this, multiple regression model is able to explain above 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: customers repurchase intentions in the context of the fashion industry (Moosa & Hassan, 2015). The ANOVA Test in Table 2 shows that $F = 243.846$ and $p = .000 < 0.05$, indicating there is significant relationship between the service recovery strategies and customer repurchase intentions.

The result of the regression analysis (Table 3) shows that out of the two indicators of service recovery strategies in influencing customers' repurchase intentions only one made significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable. The only significant factor is: apology (APG) ($B = .885$; $p = .000 < 0.05$). The other variables (response speed) did not make a significant unique contribution.

Testing of hypotheses 1 and 2 .

Decision Rule

If	$PV < 0.05$	=	Hypothesis is supported
	$PV > 0.05$	=	Hypothesis is not supported

Hypotheses 1

4.4.1 Effect of respond speed on repurchase intentions

HO₁: Respond speed does not have positive and significant effect on repurchase intentions

HA₁: Respond speed has positive and significant effect on repurchase intentions

The result of the regression analysis (Table 3) shows that respond speed made positive but insignificant contribution to explaining the dependent variable ($B = .048$; $p = .426 > 0.05$). Based on this result, the null hypothesis is accepted. It means therefore that respond speed has positive but insignificant effect on repurchase intentions. Accordingly therefore, we accept the null hypothesis;

HO₁: Respond speed does not have positive and significant effect on repurchase intentions

Hypothesis

Effect of apology on repurchase intentions

HO₂: Apology does not have positive and significant effect on repurchase intentions

HA₂: Apology has positive and significant effect on repurchase intentions

The result of the regression analysis (Table 3) shows that apology made positive but significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable ($B = .885$; $p = .000 > 0.05$). Based on this result, the

null hypothesis is rejected. It means therefore that apology has positive and significant effect on repurchase intentions. Accordingly therefore, we accept the alternative hypothesis;

HO₂: Apology has positive and significant effect on repurchase intentions

Hypotheses 3 and 4

Multiple Regression Analysis

DECISION RULE

If $PV < 0.05$ = Reject Ho

$PV > 0.05$ = Accept Ho

Table 4-6 Multiple Regression Analysis showing the effect of service recovery strategies and customer referrals

Table 4 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.838 ^a	.703	.698	.32902

a. Predictors: (Constant), Apology, Responds speed

Table 5 ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	32.529	2	16.265	150.248	.000 ^b
	Residual	13.748	127	.108		
	Total	46.277	129			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Referrals

b. Predictors: (Constant), Apology, Responds speed

Table 6 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.336	.199		6.701	.000
	Responds speed	.057	.066	.081	.861	.391
	Apology	.684	.084	.768	8.153	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Referrals

For this study, regression analysis was performed to predict the level of customers' referrals based on two independent factors of service recovery strategies. The two independent factors/dimensions of service recovery strategies are: response speed and apology.

The Table 4 shows that R is .838, R Square is .703 and adjusted R square is .698. This is an indication that 70.3% of the variance in customer repurchase intentions can be explained by the changes in independent variables of service recovery strategies of fashion designers. As a general rule, this model is considered as being a 'good fit' as this, multiple regression model is able to explain above 60% (threshold) of variance in the dependent variable: customers referrals in the context of the fashion industry (Moosa & Hassan, 2015). The ANOVA Test in Table 5 shows that $F = 150.248$ & $p = .000 < 0.05$, indicating there is significant relationship between the service recovery strategies and customer referrals.

The result of the regression analysis (Table 6) shows that out of the two indicators of service recovery strategies in influencing customers' referrals only one made significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable. The only significant factors is: apology (APG) ($B = .768$; $p = .000 < 0.05$). The other variables (response speed) did not make a significant unique contribution.

Testing of hypotheses 3 and 4.

Decision Rule

If	$PV < 0.05$	=	Hypothesis is supported
	$PV > 0.05$	=	Hypothesis is not supported

Hypotheses 3

Effect of respond speed on customer referrals

HO₃: Respond speed does not have positive and significant effect on customer referrals

HA₃: Respond speed has positive and significant effect on customer referrals

The result of the regression analysis (Table 3) shows that respond speed made positive but insignificant contribution to explaining the dependent variable ($B = .081$; $p = .391 > 0.05$). Based on this result, the null hypothesis is accepted. It means therefore that respond speed has positive but insignificant effect on customer referrals. Accordingly therefore, we accept the null hypothesis;

HO₁: Respond speed does not have positive and significant effect on customer referrals.

Hypothesis 4

Effect of apology on customer referrals

HO₃: Apology does not have positive and significant effect on customer referrals

HA₃: Apology has positive and significant effect on customer referrals

The result of the regression analysis (Table 6) shows that apology made positive but significant contribution to explaining the dependent variable ($B = .768$; $p = .000 > 0.05$). Based on this result, the

null hypothesis is rejected. It means therefore that apology has positive and significant effect on customer referrals. Accordingly therefore, we accept the alternative hypothesis;

HO₂: Apology has positive and significant effect on customer referrals.

Discussion of Findings

Effect of respond speed on customers' repurchase intentions

The findings of this study (Hypothesis 1) show that respond speed has positive and insignificant effect on customers' repurchase intentions in the fashion industry in Port Harcourt ($B=.048$; $p=.426>0.05$). The result is inconsistent with previous studies such as Dickinger (2009) and Mattila (2008), who opined that organisational response to service failure is an indication of taking responsibility for the service failure and making effort to resolve same makes room for repurchase intentions as the customers are satisfied in the process.

Effect of apology on repurchase intentions

The findings of this study (Hypothesis 2) show that apology has positive and significant effect on customers' repurchase intentions in the fashion industry in Port Harcourt ($B=.885$; $p=.000>0.05$). The result is This result is supported by Gruber (2011) and Liao et al. (2017) who discovered that apology when applied on time has the capacity to influence perceived sincerity and is a determinant of consumer satisfaction and repurchase intentions in the service domain.

Effect of respond speed on customers referrals

The findings of this study (Hypothesis 3) show that respond speed has positive and insignificant effect on customers' referrals in the fashion industry in Port Harcourt ($B=.081$; $p=.391>0.05$). This result is in line with the work of Chandrashekar (1998) and Gremler et al. (2001) who argued that organizational efforts aimed at resolving customer complaints are evaluated through the perceived promptness and convenience of the service recovery procedure.

Effect of apology on customers referrals

The findings of this study (Hypothesis 4) show that apology has positive and significant effect on customers' repurchase intentions in the fashion industry in Port Harcourt ($B=.768$; $p=.000>0.05$). This result found support of the argument of Iglesias et al. (2015) that an apology helps organisations to admit their fault in the service that failed thereby acknowledging the problem of the customer.

Conclusion

This study has successfully examined the relationship between service recovery strategies and customer patronage of fashion design firms in Port Harcourt. The study found that response speed had positive and insignificant effect on the two measures of customer patronage, while apology had positive and significant effect on the two measures of customer patronage (repurchase intention and customer referrals) Therefore the study concluded that service recovery strategy development and implementation should be closely monitored and evaluated periodically to avoid non-performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were advanced for fashion design firms in Port Harcourt for quick and appropriate implementation.

1. Managers should identify several capabilities, their relative importance, and the processes for achieving good customer experience which when properly executed, will increase revisit intention and customer referral.
2. Fashion designers should endeavour to respond quickly to customers when there is service failure.
3. Service oriented organizations that wish to implement these strategies (response speed and apology) to enhance their performance, need to communicate their strategies to all employees. The fashion designers should adequately train its staff in preparation for implementation of any strategy that impact on its performance.
4. The management should as well maintain the quality service delivery which will contribute immensely to the growth of the firm.

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