

# Recovering Together: A Moderated Mediated Analysis of Co-Created Recovery on Repatronage Intentions

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**Abstract:** Service failures can significantly impact hotel customers' loyalty, often leading to negative re-patronage intentions. However, how service recovery efforts are designed and implemented is crucial in mitigating these adverse effects. Co-created service recovery, where customers actively participate in solving service failures, has emerged as a critical strategy to improve customers' subsequent behaviours. Drawing on the value co-creation theory, this study investigates the moderating effect of co-created service recovery on customers' responses to service failures and their subsequent re-patronage intentions. A two-phase quasi-experimental study was conducted to determine the effectiveness of co-created service recovery relative to customers' aversion, distrust, and negative re-patronage intentions. Quantitative data was obtained from 153 purposively sampled participants. Data was analysed using a t-test and moderated mediation analysis using Model 14 in PROCESS macro. The findings suggest that when customers perceive their input as valued during recovery efforts, they are less likely to be aversive and distrustful towards the hotel. In turn, their negative re-patronage intentions are reduced. These findings provide important insights for hotel managers on enhancing co-creation as a service recovery strategy to improve customer loyalty and retention.

**Keywords:** Service failure, Service recovery, Value co-creation, Hospitality, Service-dominant logic

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## 1. Introduction

Behavioural intentions have become an essential concept in tourism and hospitality (T&H) literature as consumers' decision-making, satisfaction, and repatronage have been widely accepted as a measure to determine the success of T&H businesses (Afshardoost & Eshaghi 2020; Chen & Tsai 2007; Prayag et al, 2013). The prevalence of innovative technologies in the T&H industry has challenged the current understanding of behavioural intentions as the adoption of digital tools such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, virtual reality, robots, and smartphone applications have influenced customers considerably over the past decade (Yung & Khoo-Lattimore 2019).

However, more studies are needed to investigate users' behavioural responses to emerging digital technologies during co-created service recovery. Research on service failure has focused mainly on the service provider delivering recovery strategies, leaving customers' role in co-creating service recovery relatively unexplored in T&H settings (Shams et al, 2021). Co-created service recovery responses are an emerging strategy in T&H businesses where digital technologies are embedded (Bagherzdeh et al, 2020). As the term implies, co-created service recovery is a strategy where customers and providers jointly participate in addressing service failures. Past studies in T&H have examined the impacts of such strategies on customer satisfaction, loyalty, and other behavioural outcomes (e.g., Kim & Baker 2020; Zhang et al, 2021).

This gap presents an opportunity to examine the influence of co-created service recovery strategies on behavioural intentions to develop customer retention in the context of human-technology interactions in T&H settings. As such, this paper employs a two-phase quasi-experimental study to answer the research question, "How does co-created service recovery moderate the influence of customers' response to service failures towards negative repatronage intentions?" This study extends the Value Co-creation Theory to advance the understanding of how co-created service recovery strategies can drive deeper customer engagement and retention in the context of digital T&H platforms.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

### 2.1 Value Co-creation Theory and Service Recovery

Value co-creation theory emphasises that customers are not passive recipients of services but active contributors to the service process, co-creating value through their interactions with service providers (Vargo & Lusch 2008). Co-creation is the collaborative process of forming a relationship between the customer and the service provider (Roggeveen et al, 2012). This concept is rooted in Service-Dominant Logic, which posits

that customers must integrate their resources with the organisation's resources to optimise value creation (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

In the context of service failures, co-created service recoveries tend to be faster and more effective. This is because of customers' active involvement and participation in solving the issues concerning their experiences (Jin et al, 2019). As key players in this process, customers are willing to act as resource integrators in the co-recovery process. While customer co-creation generally involves customer engagement within service systems, service recovery co-creation is a more recent concept. It refers to the customer's ability to influence or customise the recovery process through collaboration with the service provider (Bakhsh & Riivits-Arkonsuo 2022). This is particularly true in T&H services, often designed to foster customer participation to drive value co-creation (Rather et al, 2019). Past research demonstrated that co-created service recovery enhanced overall service experience, customer retention, and the growth of businesses (Shams et al, 2021).

## **2.2 Service Failure**

A service failure in the hospitality and tourism industry may implicate dissatisfaction and avoidance of repurchasing or revisiting behaviour, reducing the level of confidence that threatens the business's survival (Akarsu et al, 2022). The same study identified various considerations to overcome service failures, such as service recovery strategies, recovery efforts, pre- and post-failure, and post-recovery contingencies. While emotional labour, rumination, and satisfaction recovery were distinguished as sub-themes. Since service failures are guaranteed to happen (Huang et al, 2022; Hart et al, 1990), T&H businesses strive to formulate innovative and impactful pre- and post-service recovery methods to prevent and mitigate its effects (Dong, 2020). Moreover, through a text-mining approach, Huang et al (2022) also stressed how significant it is to understand the techniques for dealing with various types and groups of customers. Thus, loyalty and scarcity of service play pivotal roles in how the customer responds to service recovery (Kim et al, 2021). A combination of monetary and non-monetary service recovery is more effective than a single effort of the establishment (Fu et al 2015). However, the appreciation and satisfaction of the customers with the company's efforts vary in their emotional response (Valentini et al, 2020; Smith et al, 2002).

## **2.3 Customer Response**

During the service recovery, the customers may express negative emotional responses, such as aversion and distrust. This becomes evident through their behaviour and mediates the relationship between perceived injustice and satisfaction (Balaji et al, 2017). Ashwini et al (2022) emphasise the greater risk of aversion from dissatisfied or frustrated customers with the service failure. Conversely, customers may feel relief or even thankful if the recovery is handled correctly and they can secure and reestablish their promise (Valentini et al, 2019; Bakar et al, 2020). On the contrary, when service failures are managed mediocrely, this may lead to distrust, irritation, and negative reviews of the establishment (Theron 2019; Weun et al, 2004). Customers also exhibit greater dissatisfaction and anger towards technology-mediated intervention than traditional employees' intervention (Chen et al., 2020). Additionally, anger and dissatisfaction are key emotive antecedents leading to consumer behaviours such as exit, a voice-out, and revenge (Li & Stacks, 2017).

Though positive and negative experiences affect customers' trust and revisit intention, negative emotions are more significant and have a more substantial impact (Han, 2005). Customers who observed and experienced severe service failure show aversion, negatively affecting the re-patronage's intentions and attitude towards hotels (Sreejesh & Anusree, 2016). Another study indicated that revisit intention is mediated by service and relation quality, which includes satisfaction and trust (Sadeghi et al, 2017), and may also be construed through the opposite lens. While AI-based services like chatbots have recently been explored and employed in hotel service, the recovery efforts led to a decline in customer satisfaction and revisit intention (Zhu et al, 2023).

*H1. Service Failures (SF) significantly influence customers' aversion (AV) towards the hotel.*

*H2. SF significantly influences customers' distrust (DT) towards the hotel.*

*H3. AV significantly influences customers' negative intentions (NI) towards the hotel.*

*H3a. AV mediates the relationship between SF and NI.*

*H4. DT significantly influences customers' NI towards the hotel.*

*H4a. DT mediates the relationship between SF and NI.*

## 2.4 Co-created Service Recovery (CR)

Jasenko et al (2022) suggest that to compensate for the customer's negative emotions, the efforts would be better if coupled with co-creation or collaboration with the customers. Value co-creation can be categorised based on customer cooperation in implementing service recovery. First is mandatory customer participation, where the customers can only make the effort. Furthermore, replaceable customer participation is an activity that the service provider can perform. Lastly, voluntary customer participation is an activity that is not essential in service encounters but is performed by customers to enhance the service experience (Dong & Sivakumar, 2016). This approach garnered mixed effects. Wherein Alotaibi et al (2023) discuss that customer participation enhances perceived value and satisfaction, contrary to the study of Van Vaerenbergh et al (2018), where co-creation in service recovery is generally weak and more beneficial to people with Eastern cultural backgrounds.

Tang et al (2021) stress that the intensity of adverse reactions affects the efficacy of service recovery efforts, and the co-creation of the service recovery is influenced by the interaction with the hotel staff (Uslu & Tosun 2021). Moreover, co-creation efforts significantly and positively impact customer satisfaction, leading to revisiting and repurchasing intention (Monteiro et al, 2023; Maryani et al, 2020). The positive responses in service recovery mediate the intention of the customers to revisit (Latif & Lanxia 2019; Guo et al, 2016), thus, can hypothetically construe to its adverse perspective.

*H5a. CR moderates customers' AV towards NI.*

*H5b. CR moderates customers' DT towards NI.*

## 3. Materials and Methods

This study employs a two-phase quasi-experimental study. In Phase 1, a t-test was conducted to determine the effectiveness of the intervention CR using pre- and post-tests. Phase 2 employed a moderated mediation analysis using PROCESS Model 14 to assess the impact of SF on customers' responses to AV, DT, and NI and the moderating effect of CR.

A total of 153 participants, summarised in Table 1, were conveniently sampled from previous guests of a chosen hotel. The experiment involved participants interacting with a virtual front desk agent in an augmented reality simulation using HyperSkill. These participants gave consent to participate in a simulated laboratory experiment. Ethical clearance was obtained, and confidentiality and risk reduction protocols were enforced before the experiment commenced.

**Table 1: Participants' Demographic Profile (N = 153)**

|                          | <i>n</i> | %    |
|--------------------------|----------|------|
| <b>Sex</b>               |          |      |
| Female                   | 78       | 50.9 |
| Male                     | 75       | 49.1 |
| <b>Generation</b>        |          |      |
| 18-25                    | 57       | 37.2 |
| 26-45                    | 52       | 33.9 |
| 46 and up                | 44       | 28.9 |
| <b>Occupation Status</b> |          |      |
| Employed Full-Time       | 75       | 49.0 |
| Employed Part-Time       | 28       | 18.3 |
| Student                  | 26       | 16.9 |
| Unemployed               | 24       | 15.8 |

The simulation showed a scenario where the front desk agent tells the participant that their booking cannot be accommodated because the hotel has no vacancy (Xu et al, 2014). A survey prompted the participants to rate the SF, AV, DT, and NI. Then, the simulation proceeded to a co-created service recovery scenario where the front desk agent apologised and asked to solve the service failure by looking over available rooms on the

Internet together (Bagherzadeh et al, 2020). After this, another survey prompted the participants to evaluate the service recovery intervention, AV, DT, and NI.

Data was obtained from a survey questionnaire consisting of existing validated scales to measure AV, DT, NI, and CR. The variables were gauged from the indicators adapted from preceding studies: AV (Muhammad et al, 2019), DT (Radu et al, 2019), NI (Harrison-Walker, 2019), and CR (Liao 2007). The questionnaire utilised a 5-point Likert scale with a corresponding verbal interpretation of 5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neither Disagree nor Agree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly Disagree where the respondents evaluated their reactions based on the given scenario. The researchers employed a 5-point scale in measuring attitude and reactions since odd choices provide better reliability (Adelson & McCoach 2010; Kusmaryono et al, 2022).

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Phase One

A t-test was conducted to compare the participants' behaviour before and after the service recovery intervention. The results in Table 2 illustrate a visible and significant change in participants' behaviour before and after the intervention. This was tested using a paired samples t-test for AV ( $t = 2.37, p < .01$ ), DT ( $t = 2.29, p < .001$ ), and NI ( $t = 2.86, p < .05$ ).

**Table 2: Effectiveness of Technology-mediated Service Recovery**

|    | Before Service Recovery | After Service Recovery |
|----|-------------------------|------------------------|
| AV | 2.47                    | 2.21                   |
| DT | 3.19                    | 2.93                   |
| NI | 3.25                    | 2.88                   |

### 4.2 Phase Two

The regression analysis results to determine the predictive value of Model 1 SF on AV ( $F = 14.36, p < .001, R^2 = .17$ ) and Model 2 DT ( $F = 16.21, p < .001, R^2 = .19$ ). Similarly, regression analysis was conducted on Model 3 and 4, which determined the effects of AV on NI ( $F = 14.36, p < .001, R^2 = .17$ ) and DT on NI ( $F = 14.36, p < .001, R^2 = .17$ ) respectively. All four hypotheses were accepted, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3: Regression Analysis**

| Hypotheses              | $\beta$ | t-Value | p-Value | Remarks  |
|-------------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| H1: SF $\rightarrow$ AV | 0.34    | 8.36    | .000*** | Accepted |
| H2: SF $\rightarrow$ DT | 0.36    | 8.72    | .000*** | Accepted |
| H3: AV $\rightarrow$ NI | -0.48   | -2.80   | .005**  | Accepted |
| H4: DT $\rightarrow$ NI | 0.65    | 4.49    | .000*** | Accepted |

Note. \* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

A moderated mediation analysis used Model 14 in PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022). These results, shown in Table 4, include SF as an independent variable, AV and DT as mediators, CR as a moderator, and NI as the dependent variable. Conditional indirect effects indicate that AV and DT mediate the relationship between SF and NI when CR is high. The index of moderated mediation was significant for SF  $\rightarrow$  AV  $\rightarrow$  NI (index = 0.50, Boot SE = 0.02, 95% CI [0.0172, 0.0860] and SF  $\rightarrow$  DT  $\rightarrow$  NI (index = -0.39, Boot SE = 0.02, 95% CI [-0.0736, -0.0093]. CR moderates the relationships between AV and NI (path b: Effect = 0.15,  $t = 3.19, p < .01$ ) and DT and NI (path b: Effect = -0.11,  $t = -2.62, p < .01$ ). These findings provide support for H3a, H3a, H5a, and H5b.

**Table 4: Moderated-Mediated Analysis**

| IV | DV | W  | a1   | a2    | b     | c'   | Effect | Lower CL | Upper CL |
|----|----|----|------|-------|-------|------|--------|----------|----------|
| NI | AV | CR | 0.34 | 0.15  | -0.48 | 0.06 | 0.50*  | 0.02     | 0.09     |
|    | DT | CR | 0.36 | -0.11 | 0.65  | 0.06 | -0.39* | -0.070   | -0.01    |

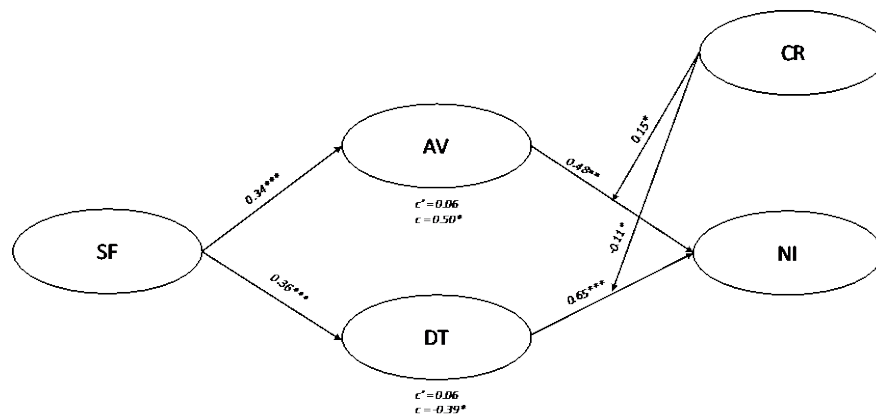
a1. Effect of IV on M; a2. Effect of interaction between IV and M on W; b. Effect of M on DV; c'. Direct effect of IV on DV; \* $p < .05$ .

## 5. Discussions and Conclusions

This study addresses the limited literature on co-created service recovery responses in T&H businesses where digital technologies are embedded. A quasi-experimental study was conducted on 153 participants to reveal significant contributions and implications. The results provide essential insights for theory and practice. The t-test results from Phase 1 confirm the positive effect of CR after service failures. Post-intervention results suggest a significant decrease in AV, implying that customers are less likely to avoid the service or express a strong dislike for the hotel after the CR efforts. This demonstrates that collaboratively addressing service failures can rebuild trust with the service provider after SF (Alotaibi et al, 2023; Vargo & Lusch 2008).

Similarly, customers reported significantly reduced DT when CR interventions were implemented. This aligns with past studies illustrating that involving customers in the service recovery process restored their trust in the service provider and became a critical factor in rebuilding customer relationships (e.g., Collier et al, 2017; Jasenko et al, 2022). The results also reveal that customers' NI decreased following the CR intervention. This illustrates the effectiveness of CR in mitigating negative word-of-mouth or discontinuing service use because of the SF. In this vein, hotel managers and customers should collectively work to resolve the issue, reinforcing value co-creation by turning a negative experience into an opportunity to enhance the service relationship.

In Phase 2, the results of the regression analysis confirm the influence of SF towards negative customer behavioural intentions AV and DT (e.g., Akarsu et al, 2022; Ashwini et al, 2022). Specifically, results suggest that SF has a significant impact on AV. This implies that SF leads customers to develop a dislike or avoidance of the hotel. This is particularly concerning in the hospitality industry, where customer experience is paramount. Increased AV can decrease the likelihood of repeat business and deter potential customers through negative word-of-mouth. In the same light, SF contributes to heightened DT, indicating that customers may lose confidence in the hotel's ability to provide reliable service. DT can have long-term implications; it can be challenging to regain once lost (Zhu et al, 2023). Hotels must address the immediate issues caused by service failures and work actively to rebuild trust through transparency and consistent communication (Kim & Zhang 2021).



**Figure 1: Moderated Mediation Model**

The results also confirm previous research that AV and DT lead to NI (e.g., Theron 2019; Sadeghi et al, 2017). In this study, AV has a significant negative impact on NI. This means that the more customers experience feelings of AV, the fewer negative intentions they are likely to have. When faced with an unpleasant experience, customers might prefer to just avoid the hotel again instead of dealing with the emotional labour of expressing dissatisfaction or acting on negative behaviours (Simillidou et al, 2020). Similarly, DT has a significant impact on NI. Even if a hotel attempts to rectify a service failure, customers with high DT are likelier to cease their relationship with the hotel. Therefore, hotel managers should engage with customers through value co-creation, such as CR, to minimise customers' emotional strain and feel connected in solving the service failure.

The novelty of the study lies in the moderated mediation analysis. The results reveal that CR strengthens the relationship between AV and NI while weakening the relationship between DT and NI. The positive effect of CR on the relationship between AV and NI indicates that higher levels of CR intensify customers' negative emotions. Despite high CR efforts, the negative feelings associated with the SF might persist, causing customers to hold onto NI. From a value co-creation perspective, this outcome highlights a critical disconnect in the recovery process. This contradicts previous literature, which argues that service recovery efforts lessen

feelings of AV and NI (e.g., Chang & Cheng 2021). In this study, customers' AV could have been caused by an emotional response, such as frustration or anger, which are more challenging to diffuse (Kim et al, 2021; Tan & Li 2023). In this case, CR efforts are perceived as inadequate and thus amplify AV. This breakdown in co-creation occurs when customers' emotional needs are not adequately addressed, even if the service provider invests considerable effort in recovery (Rather et al, 2019).). As an implication for practitioners, CR efforts should be aligned with the customer's emotional needs, such as showing more empathy and remorse.

On the contrary, results also indicate that high levels of CR weaken the impact of DT on NI. This implies that CR more effectively addresses cognitive feelings such as DT by providing reassurance, explanations, and clear evidence of corrective actions during CR (Jamal & Bucklin 2016). Value co-creation emphasises the importance of mutual engagement and active participation in recovery efforts to restore the value of the service relationship (Jin et al, 2019). As such, hotel managers should bank on CR so customers' negative behavioural intentions are reduced and stronger customer relationships are fostered. Such CR efforts elucidate the service provider's reliability and competence, reducing the customer's NI. This aligns with past studies, which posit that SF strategies can mitigate negative DT and NI (Borah et al, 2019).

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