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Influence of Culture on Service Recovery Expectations

Swati Sharma

Abstract:

The positive effects of service recovery and customer satisfaction are well documented in literature. (Spreng, Harrell, and Mackoy 1995, Hess 2003, McCole, Patrick, 2004, Maxham III 2001; Swanson and Kelley 2001). However researchers argue that a satisfactory recovery varies according to a range of relational factors like consumers' relational recovery expectations (Anderson and Sullivan 1993). The question remains as to why one or more recovery initiatives (e.g., apology, empathy, compensation, replacement, process control, timeliness, assurance of no recurrence) are indispensable in one situation but pointless in another.

KEYWORD:

Influence of Culture, Literature Review, Service Recovery.

INTRODUCTION

Most of the management studies on the effects of culture identify culture with nation or ethnicity (Atila Yuksel et al., 2004; Lorenzoni and Lewis, 2004). Further, they propose that the identification of culture with nation may lead to systematic errors in within-nation studies (Torsten Ringberg, Gaby Odekerken-Schröder, & Glenn L. Christensen 2007). This is particularly true in large countries like India which is a subcontinent and enjoys varied culture, religion and traditions. Following this new school of thought, this study measures cultural dimensions at the level of individuals. This empirical research paper proposes that they are the result of the provider failing to account for consumers' cultural models, which create unique recovery preferences and expectations after a service failure. The relationship between culture and service quality/satisfaction has been investigated by several recent studies (Winsted, 1997; Donthu and Yoo, 1998; Mattila, 1999; Furrer et al., 2000). The objective of this research paper is to link the customers cultural orientation with the perception of service recovery. Five dimension of culture established by Hofstede's (1980, 1981) five dimension of culture are used to link with six service recovery dimension (Sharma.S., et al. 2011).

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Service Recovery

Service recovery refers to the action taken by a service provider in response to service failure (Grönroos, 1988). Service recovery can be implied as a "bundle of resources" that an organization can employ in response to a failure. By treating recovery in this manner, we are able to examine the specific determinants of an effective recovery and the relative importance of individual recovery attributes in restoring customer satisfaction. An effective service recovery action not only retains customers, but also enhances customer satisfaction and loyalty (DeWitt and Brady, 2003; Dube' and Maute, 1996; Feinberg et al., 1990; Halstead and Page, 1992; Mattila, 2001; Maxham, 2001; Swanson and Kelley, 2001; Tax et al., 1998). Service failure and failed recoveries are leading causes of customer switching to the competitor and inevitably lead to the high costs of acquiring new customers (Hart et al., 1990 e.g., Reinartz and Kumar

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2000). Hotels (the accommodation sector) are operational 24/7. They are characterized by continuous operations and highly varying demand, relative to constant rates of supply, which increases the probability of service failure in this industry more than any other industry (Collie et al., 2000; Lewis and McCann, 2004). The service providers in the hotel industry, therefore, find it very difficult to deliver a zero-defect service (Fisk, Brown, and Bitner, 1995). Therefore the service providers should truly follow the motto "The customer is the King"

Culture:

With the increase in global activities of both domestic and multinational companies, managers need a good understanding of culture. People's cultural backgrounds influence their assumptions about how work and interactions with other people should proceed. Culture is the unique characteristic of a social group, the values and norms shared by its members set it apart from other social groups. Dawar and Parker 1994 proposed against the common belief where culture is understood in terms of nation. National boundaries do not always coincide with culturally homogeneous societies (Dawar and Parker 1994; Roth 1995).

The cultural orientation of the customers explains as to why one or more recovery initiatives (e.g., apology, empathy, compensation, replacement, process control, timeliness, assurance of no recurrence) are indispensable in one situation but pointless in another. The dissertation proposes that they are the result of the consumers' cultural models, which create unique recovery preferences and expectations after a service failure. Culture is everything that people have and think, as members of a society (Ferraro, 2002). With the trend of globalization, growth of transnational corporations, and the emergence of culture related issues, cultural difference reveals its significance in terms of explaining the behavior of consumers and designing efficient marketing strategies and tools (Weiermair, 2000). Service performance perceptions; filtered through the lens of culture (Liu et al., 2001) have been found to directly affect perceived service quality and satisfaction (Halstead et al., 1994). Much of the research on culture is based on the work of Hofstede (1980, 1991). He defines culture in terms of five dimensions: Power Distance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity Uncertainty Avoidance and Long Term Orientation

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve our objective of establishing link between the culture and service recovery expectations a randomly chosen sample of final year undergraduate students were administered a questionnaire. A hypothetical service failure was given to them ("You and your family visit a place of tourist interest. On arriving the hotel staff informs you that the your confirmed rooms are not available due to double booking. Its new years eve and all other hotels are booked"). The respondents were then given a recovery action in which the service provider makes apologizes and makes you wait for 45 minutes. During the waiting period the front desk personnel does not inform you on the progress being made to solve your problem. However after 45 minutes the front desk personnel again apologizes and solves your problem"). Only those respondents were chosen for the studies, who have had the experience of staying in a hotel for at least a week in past one year. Five dimension of culture established by Hofstede's (1980, 1981) and six dimension of service recovery are used to link with six service recovery dimension (Sharma.S., et al.2011). The validity and reliability of the questionnaire was tested. The customer recovery expectations were tapped in section A (cronbach alspha 0.850) and the cultural orientation was tapped in section B(cronbach alspha: 0.756)of the instruments. The data collected from a sample of 99 was entered in excel and SPSS 17.0 was used for the statistical analysis.

These 5 factors extracted by principal component analysis with varimax as the rotation method included the items which have loadings of more than 0.43 and have been referred as the dimensions of culture in further analysis.

Uncertainty Avoidance Values: Individuals who are high on this continuum avoid ambiguous, and undefined situations and are easily worried, nervous and irritable. In contrast the people with low score on uncertainty avoidance dislike regulation, formalization and standardization; they are adventurous and are more willing to undertake risks.(Furrer et al.2000 and Donthu and Yoo 1998),

Collectivism values: It is explained by the extent to which people in the society define themselves as part of larger groups. They believe that one should be concerned about the benefits of the group (Hofstede and Bond, 1988; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961, Mattila, 1999)

Long term orientation values: are explained by the extent to which society is focused on the future as opposed to the past and present. They value morality and try always to be patient. They believe that maintaining long-term interpersonal relationships and thus they would not place strict requirements on the

service personnel. (Hofstede 1991)

Masculinity:

reflects how values such as performance, competition., ambition, wealth, materialism, success and competition prevails over feminine values like quality of life, warm personal relationships, solidarity, equality, environmental preservation and caring for others (Hofstede, 1980, 1991, 1994).

Power distance Values:

Is explained by the extent to which the people of a particular culture are willing to accept unequal power distribution. People with high power distance usually indulge in centralized decision making and would demand the perspectives of the reliability and consistency of service and the capacity of accurately offering the service they promise assistance solve problems immediately with empathy. (Furrer et al., 2000).

SERVICE RECOVERY FACTORS:

Six factors extracted and used for further studies have been referred as the dimensions of service recovery (Sharma.S., et al.2011). The explanation of each is given below:

Empowerment:

This factor measured the perception of the customer regarding the level confidence and degree to which the customer felt satisfied with the efforts of the service provider were measured. The researchers also studied this attribute and have found the link between satisfaction from service recovery and empowerment. (Hart et al., 1990; Hartline and Ferrell, 1996)

Reliability:

Measured on four items, this factors taps the perception about the consumer regarding the level of trust and integrity of the service organization. This factor has found its reference in the work of many researchers and is found to significantly affect the level of satisfaction from service recovery (Sirdeshmukh et al., 2002; Lapierre, 2000).

Communication:

This factor was measured on 4 items and refers to the employees' interpersonal skills like being polite, courteous, and empathetic treatment to the customers. These attributes of the service provider were also found in the service recovery literature. (Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar 1998; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, 1990; Michel, 2001).

Standardized Policies and Procedures:

It refers to the policies and procedures being laid out for the service executives by the service organization to handle a situation of service failure in an effective manner. (Tax et al. 1998, McColl-Kennedy and Sparks. 2003).

Compensation:

The link between compensation and satisfaction from the service recovery has been emphasized and studied by many researchers (Oliver and Swan 1989, Sparks and Callan 1995, Walster, Berscheid, and Walster (1973) Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar (1998)

Response Time:

The issues of timing, responsiveness, and customer waiting have been addressed in the complaint and service encounter literature (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault 1990; Kelley, Hoffman, and Davis 1993; Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry 1985). A quick recovery response to a service failure will enhance

customers' evaluations (Gilly and Gelb 1982; Hart, Heskett, and Sasser 1990; Palmer et al., 2000).

To study the influence of culture and the perceived relative importance of the service recovery dimensions:

Cultural Profile of the Respondents:

The cultural profile of the respondents was tapped. The table below gives the cultural profile of the respondents in this group. The distributions statistics are used to outline the cultural characteristics of the group of respondents. Second, Pearson's correlation coefficients are used to test the hypothesis on the relationships between the dimensions of culture and attributes of service recovery.

Table1.0 Means and Standard deviation of Dimension of Culture (N=99)

Factor Name	Mean	Standard Deviation
Collectivism	4.25	.42
Uncertainty Avoidance	4.04	.53
Long Term Orientation	4.03	.61
Masculinity	3.87	.62
Power Distance:	3.68	.76

The mean of the responses as captured on a five point scale is listed in table1.1. It is observed that that the mean for the factor. Collectivism is the highest i.e. 4.25. This shows that the respondents have high collectivism orientation. They have strong social ties. Collectivist fear loss of face and therefore generally do not indulge in complaints after a poor service. This is closely followed by the mean of. uncertainty avoidance. This implies that the respondents in this group are collectivists and have a low inclination towards risk. A feeling of “what is different is dangerous” prevails (Hofstede, 1991) among the people of this orientation. They prefer certainty over uncertainty. The long term orientation has emerged as the third most important cultural value third dimension indicating that the respondents in this group believe in the long term relationship with the service provider of their choice. Redpath and Nielson stated that people with long term orientation include values like thrift, saving, persistence with slow results, adaptation of traditions to a modern context, acceptance of unequal relationship, and a concern for virtue rather than truth. Masculinity also hovers around 4, (3.87) thus indicating that the customers are moderately high on this orientation. They believe in success and value decisiveness, assertiveness, competitiveness (Holt)

Power distance hovers around the mid point (3.68). We thus deduce that the respondents in this group have a score of masculinity on the higher side but are neutral, i.e. neither very high nor very low on the continuum so far as power distance is considered.

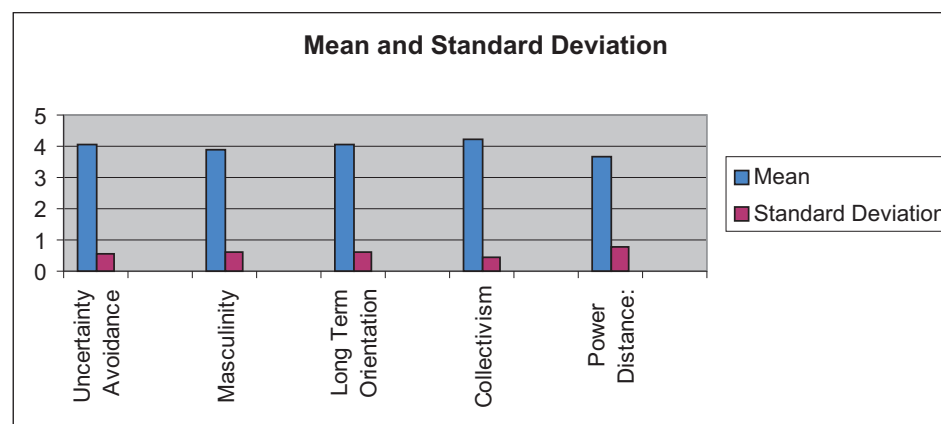


Figure 1.1 Means and Standard Deviation of Dimensions of Culture

The mean and standard deviations of the dimensions of service recovery were calculated, The means indicate the perception of the customer regarding the service recovery attributes after the recovery action. The responses were captured on a four point scale with four as the strongly agree and one as strongly disagree. After the factor analysis, when the six factors emerged, the score of each of the factors was computed by taking out the mean of the items falling under each factor. The ranking of the dimensions based on the means and standard deviations is shown in Table 1.1. Figure 1.2. gives the graphical representation of the same.

Table 1.1: Means and Standard deviation of dimensions of Service Recovery (N=99)

Factor Name	Mean	Standard Deviation
Communication	2.80	.51
Compensation	2.72	.67
Standardized policies	2.71	.51
Reliability	2.36	.56
Response Time	2.29	.78
Empowerment	1.85	.65

It is observed that the mean for the dimension communication is the highest (m =2.80, SD=.51). The customers with the given recovery action feel satisfied so far this factor is concerned. They perceive the service provider as polite, caring, kind and empathetic.

The mean for the factor compensation is the second highest (m=2.72, SD=.67). The customers perceive the service provider to be fair in its dealing. The customers do not feel at loss or being short changed. They perceive that the compensation for the inconvenience was fair.

The table 1.2 shows that the mean of the standardized policies is ranked as third most important dimension (m=2.71, SD=.51). In the given situation the customers perceive that the policies and procedures of the service provider are satisfying. They feel that the guidelines in the form of policies are well laid out to deal with such exigencies.

The mean of the dimension response time and reliability hovers at the mid point of the four point likert scale revealing that the customers neither agree nor disagree so far as these two dimensions are concerned.(m=2.29, SD=.78 and m=2.36 and SD=.56 respectively).However the customers do not perceive the service provider as empowered. As the mean is skewed to the left (m=1.85, SD=.65). This may be because of the fact that the customer expected an apology, which they perceived as a part of the standardized policy of the company but would have been delighted if they were given a customized treatment, something beyond an apology,

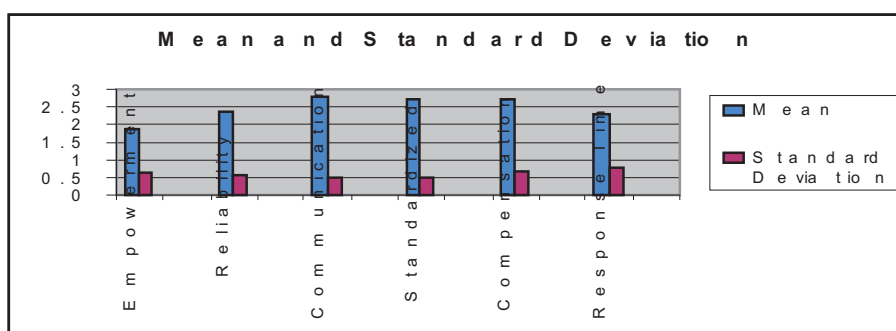


Figure 1.2 Means and Standard Deviation of Dimensions of Service Recovery

Pearson's correlation coefficients between the dimensions of culture and dimensions of service recovery were also calculated in order to find out the relationship between the two

The Pearson correlation coefficient of the dimensions of culture and dimensions of service recovery is shown in Table 1.3. The table clearly shows that four of the five dimensions of culture have significant correlation with the dimension of service recovery. The correlations were statistically significant at 0.05 levels. The interpretation of each variable is explained below.

Table 1.3: Relationship (Correlation Coefficient) of Dimensions of cultural orientation with Dimensions of service recovery satisfaction (N=99)

Dimensions of RSAT	Uncertainty Avoidance	Masculinity	Long Term Orientation	Collectivism	Power distance
Empowerment	-0.032	0.009	0.070	-0.153	0.122
Reliability	0.137	0.127	0.239**	0.046	0.190*
Communication	-0.024	0.268**	0.193*	0.052	0.183
Standardized policies	0.029	0.106	0.050	-0.096	0.148
Compensation	0.155	-0.027	0.070	0.060	0.280**
Response time	-0.177	0.039	0.052	-0.228*	0.082

*Significant at .05 level. ** Significant at .01 level.

DISCUSSION:

A detailed discussion of how culture influences the perception of the service recovery dimensions in the eyes of the customer is given below:

Uncertainty Avoidance:

The table shows that there is no significant relationship of uncertainty avoidance values with each dimension of satisfaction from service recovery. The customers in the group are moderately high on this dimension, and the service failure disturbs their zone of comfort and later to add to their discomfiture the absence of updates on the progress being made to resolve their problem perturbs them more.

Though insignificant there is a negative directional relationship so far as three dimensions of service recovery are concerned. They are empowerment, communication and response time. This indicates that in the event of absence of any compensation and feedback, mere apology from the service provider makes the customer with low uncertainty avoidance score perceive the service provider as less empowered, less empathetic, and slow in taking the desired response.

Masculinity:

The table shows that there is a significant relationship between masculinity values so far as the communication dimension of satisfaction from service recovery is concerned. ($r=0.268$ $p < 0.01$). The group is characterized by customers with high Masculine values. (mean =3.87) Holt characterizes such people as those who tend to value decisiveness, assertiveness, competitiveness and some other traditional manly values as necessary characters to play the leading roles. The crisp and assertive apology with the problem being solved without much fuss and explanation is taken positively by the customers of masculine values. The customers of this orientation perceive positively about the five (four insignificant and one significant relationship) out of six dimensions of service recovery. Though insignificant, but a negative relationship is found between the dimension compensation and the dimension masculinity. The customers of this orientation were not satisfied with the compensation (apology and no feedback) in the given situation.

Long Term Orientation: The table shows that there is a significant relationship between the variable long term orientation and two of the dependent variables i.e. reliability and communication dimensions of service recovery. The customers of this orientation can be characterized as people who exhibit a long-term future oriented perspective [68,67] (Hofstede, 1980, 1991). The customers of this orientation believe in maintaining long term relationship with the service provider and therefore they are forgiving the relatively poor service from the service provider they care most (Tsoukatos and Rand, 2007). There is a significant and positive correlation between long term orientation and reliability dimensions of the satisfaction from the service recovery is concerned ($r=0.239$ significant at 0.01 level.). The customers of long term orientation perceive the service provider as reliable and capable of provider error free service. They also perceive the service provider to be empathetic kind and courteous and therefore have a significant positive correlation with the dimension communication. ($r=0.193$ significant at 0.05 level). It is observed that though insignificant yet there is positive correlation between all the six dimensions of service recovery and the dimension long term orientation.

Collectivism :

The table shows that there is a significant negative relationship between collectivism values so far as the response time is concerned. ($r=-0.227$ significant at 0.05 level.). This relationship indicates that people with collectivism values perceive that the service provider has taken too much of time to respond to the service failure. The customers of this group have a high mean (Mean=4.25) of this score thus indicating that the customers have high value for group and have strong cohesive ties between the group members (Hall, 1984, [68,67] Hofstede, 1980, 1991). In the given situation where the service provider in his recovery action does not provide compensation or feedback but merely offers an apology the collectivist customer perceives poorly about three out of six dimensions of service recovery. The customer who is with his family perceives significantly negative about the time taken to respond. The 45 minutes taken to provide rooms for the customer and his family was perceived as too long and therefore the relationship is inverse between the two dimensions.

Power Distance:

The table shows that there is a significant relationship between power distance values and reliability and fair compensation are concerned. Power distance is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" [67] (Hofstede, 1991).

Accept centralization and formalization of authority and tolerate the lack of autonomy. The customers of this orientation are characterized as weak in relation to the service agents (students who are not patronizing the hotel much) and therefore are prepared to accept the relatively less reliable service from powerful service provider [54,55] (Donthu and Yoo, 1988; Furrer et al., 2000). Thus we observe that there is a positive relationship between the six dimensions of service recovery and the dimension power distance. And significant and positive correlation with reliability ($r=0.190$ $p < 0.01$) and compensation ($r=0.280$ $p < 0.01$). An apology without compensation and feedback is acceptable as fair compensation to the weak power distance customers.

CONCLUSION

Overall the analysis provides support to the fact that culture has an influence on service recovery perceptions. Three of the cultural dimensions are related to the dimensions of service recovery. Masculinity is related with the perception of communication, long term orientation is associated with reliability and communication and Power distance with reliability and compensation.

This research is of value for both academicians and service practitioners. The service providers need to keep in mind that while handling . The research provides the link between culture and service recovery perceptions and for the practitioners it provides the guidelines to tailor their recovery actions according to the cultural profile of the customers.

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