

Mayday, mayday, mayday! Requesting a satisfactory recovery from a service failure.



When a customer experiences a problem with a service provider, the prospect of them repeating business will plummet significantly without some form of redress. Additionally, aggrieved customers might disseminate this bad experience to their family and friends, take deliberate actions to retaliate, or rally with other aggrieved customers against the offending service provider. Needless to say, the impact of a service failure can have a disastrous effect on an airline's reputation and financial performance. This warrants the need for service recovery strategies as mitigative control measures against the damaging effects of service failures. Yet, despite the importance, little is known on customers' anti-consumption attitudes and behaviours in the wake of service failure and recovery in the airline industry.

An experimental study was conducted by Tjeripo Hjarunguru, a [Master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#), to explore the underlying factors that predict or inhibit customers' anti-consumption following service failure and recovery in

the South African domestic airline industry. Specifically, this study utilised the justice theory as the theoretical underpinning to gain insight into the role of customers' satisfaction and perceived justice with the service recovery in inhibiting their subsequent avoidance of the airline. Further, this study examined the extent to which the occurrence of brand avoidance following service failure and recovery predicts negative word-of-mouth, anti-brand actions, and anti-brand activism.

Findings from 313 airline passengers, who responded to various service failure and recovery scenarios in a self-administered online questionnaire, revealed that respondents who perceive adequate recovery responding to the three dimensions of justice (i.e. distributive, procedural, and interactional) and who are satisfied with the recovery process, are less inclined to subsequently avoid the airline after a service failure. Contrastingly, the findings further revealed that respondents who avoid a particular airline after perceiving service recovery as unjust and unsatisfactory, are more inclined to subsequently spread negative word-of-mouth and partake in anti-brand actions and activism against the airline.

Service marketers, particularly those in the airline industry, should pay close attention to ensure that their recovery strategies address all three dimensions of justice satisfactorily. This entails ensuring that frontline employees are well mannered and trained in the polite interpersonal treatment of customers, that all tangible outcomes are tailored to fully compensate the service complaint, and that the entire service recovery process is prompt and efficient. However, in the unfortunate event where service recovery proves unsuccessful, service marketers are urged to take swift action on a case by case basis. Severe cases that affect the most loyal customers should take precedence and handled with the utmost care and understanding, before addressing less severe cases, whilst still maintaining similar care and understanding.

This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [Master's degree](#) in Marketing Management in 2020 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by Tjeripo Hjarunguru under the supervision of [Prof PG Mostert](#).