



# Tourism and Recreation

<https://dergipark.org.tr/tourismandrecreation>

E-ISSN: 2687-1971

## Service failures that cause customer dissatisfaction and service recovery strategies in food and beverage businesses

### *Yiyecek içecek işletmelerinde müşteri memnuniyetsizliğine neden olan hizmet hataları ve telafi stratejileri*

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#### ARTICLE INFO / MAKALE BİLGİSİ

Research Article / Araştırma

Key Words:

Service failure, service recovery strategies, customer dissatisfaction, food and beverage businesses.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Hizmet hatası, Telafi stratejileri, Müşteri memnuniyetsizliği, Yiyecek ve içecek işletmeleri

Received Date /Gönderme Tarihi:

09.09.2023

Accepted Date /Kabul Tarihi:

24.12.2023

Published Online /Yayımlanma Tarihi:

30.12.2023

DOI:

10.53601/tourismandrecreation.1373123

#### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to descriptively determine the service failures that cause customer dissatisfaction in food and beverage businesses and the applied service recovery strategies. Within the scope of the study, data were collected from employees working in various positions in restaurants located in tourism centers in different regions of Turkey, with a semi-structured interview form consisting of 15 questions between the 19th August and 24th August 2022. As a result of the research, it was determined that service failures were mostly experienced in food taste, service speed and price. In response to service failures, employees have implemented service recovery strategies such as apologizing, voiding the check or invoice, offering free food or drinks, and offering to make a new order. This study contributes to the identification and understanding of service failures encountered in food and beverage businesses and the service recovery strategies applied. Additionally, in the study, employees emphasized the importance of issues such as effective communication and training in reducing or completely eliminating customer dissatisfaction.

#### ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın amacı, yiyecek içecek işletmelerinde müşteri memnuniyetsizliğine neden olan hizmet hatalarını ve uygulanan telafi stratejilerini betimsel olarak belirlemektir. Çalışma kapsamında 19 Ağustos - 24 Ağustos 2022 tarihleri arasında Türkiye'nin farklı bölgelerindeki turizm merkezlerinde yer alan restoranlarda çeşitli pozisyonlarda görev yapan çalışanlardan 15 sorudan oluşan yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu ile veri toplanmıştır. Araştırma sonucunda hizmet hatalarının en çok yemek lezzeti, servis hızı ve fiyat konularında yaşandığı tespit edilmiştir. Hizmet hatalarına karşılık olarak çalışanlar özür dileme, hesabı geçersiz kılma, ücretsiz yiyecek veya içecek ikram etme ve siparişi yeniden hazırlamayı teklif etme gibi telafi stratejileri uygulamışlardır. Bu çalışma, yiyecek ve içecek işletmelerinde karşılaşılan hizmet hatalarının ve uygulanan telafi stratejilerinin tanımlanmasına ve anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca çalışmada çalışanlar, müşteri memnuniyetsizliğinin azaltılması ya da tamamen ortadan kaldırılmasında etkili iletişim ve eğitim gibi konuların önemini vurgulamışlardır.

## 1. Introduction

Customers are the financial and intellectual capital of businesses. The survival and success of businesses depends on their attitude towards customers and business performance. Therefore, providing quality products that exceed customers' needs and expectations has become the leading approach of many businesses (Akhtari et al., 2015). Since consumers' expectations are an important factor affecting their evaluation of purchasing experiences, consumers become

dissatisfied, disappointed and display complaint behavior when expectations are not met by the current performance of a product or service (Nimako, 2012: 86). The reason for this is service failures occurring in businesses. Service failure is service performance that falls below the customer's expectations (Zeithaml et al., 2018). Businesses should avoid service errors whenever possible. However, even if service businesses improve their service quality, they inevitably make service mistakes, resulting in unhappy customers. This is the nature of the service industry. Characteristic features of

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services such as intangibility, inseparability and variability increase the possibility of service failure (Aydın, 2020: 210-211). Food and beverage businesses are also among the businesses where service failures are frequently experienced due to their characteristics. The fact that food and beverage businesses have a labor-intensive structure and production and consumption occur simultaneously makes it inevitable for service failures to occur in these businesses. For this reason, appropriate service recovery strategies need to be implemented for customers who encounter various service failures. Service recovery includes all actions taken by a service provider to resolve a customer's problem with the business (Grönroos, 1990). In other words, service recovery covers the responses of food and beverage businesses to service failures.

Since customers are the main focus of businesses, it is not possible for businesses to operate without customers. Food and beverage businesses also need to retain loyal and frequent purchasing customers because they offer perishable products (Roberts-Lombard, 2009: 236). If the product or service offered does not satisfy customer emotions, customer dissatisfaction will occur and it will not be possible for customers to remain loyal to that product or brand. If customer satisfaction improves, customers will remain loyal to the business and their loyalty will provide profit to the business (Khan et al., 2013: 57). Customer satisfaction will lead to positive behavioral intentions such as repeat purchase and positive word of mouth (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). In addition, satisfied customers will be less price sensitive, purchase additional products, be less affected by competitors, remain loyal for longer (Hansemark & Albinsson, 2004) and will tend to establish a positive and friendly relationship with the business (Ibojo & Asabi, 2015: 59).

Considering the consequences of customer dissatisfaction such as losing customers, negatively affecting customer loyalty, negative word of mouth communication and reducing business profitability, it becomes important to identify service failures that cause customer dissatisfaction in food and beverage businesses and to develop service recovery strategies. While reviewing the literature, one finds that a large number of studies are typically conducted from the viewpoint of the customer. In this research, customer dissatisfaction, service failure and service recovery strategies were handled from the perspective of the employees and the businesses were provided to evaluate themselves. Based on the importance of the subject, this research aims to descriptively examine the service recovery strategies applied by employees in food and beverage businesses against service failures that cause customer dissatisfaction. In this regard, the current study covers food and beverage businesses located in tourism regions and hosting local and foreign customers, and is limited to taking the opinions of employees in positions such as managers, service chiefs and service personnel.

## 2. Methods

Qualitative research is a study in which unstructured interviews, observations, documents and data obtained from similar sources are analyzed and a procedure is used to present the investigated occurrences and phenomena in

realistic and comprehensive ways in natural settings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). As per Sandelowski (2004), the qualitative research approach encompasses methods and mindsets for comprehending how people perceive, comprehend, and analyze the social environment, as well as how they participate in knowledge generation procedures and generate outcomes. From this vantage point, qualitative research makes it possible to gather rich, in-depth data about the subject of study. For this reason, in this study, which was conducted to descriptively examine the service recovery strategies applied by employees in food and beverage businesses against service failures that cause customer dissatisfaction, qualitative research method was used and interview technique was preferred as the data collection tool.

For the application part of the research, first of all, Ethical Approval dated 18.08.2022 and numbered 2022/09 was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Hatay Mustafa Kemal University.

### 2.1. Data Collection

Büyükoztürk et al. (2008) state that the primary method of data collection in qualitative research is the interviewing method. Interviewing is both an art and a science because it involves so many different elements, such as skill, sensitivity, focus, interpersonal understanding, foresight, mental alertness, and discipline (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In studies conducted by applying the interview technique, studies are mostly carried out on small sample groups (Silverman, 2001). It is recommended that the sample size be at least 15 in all qualitative data collection studies (Mason, 2010). According to Balcı (2007), using the purposive sampling method, the researcher makes evaluations about who will be included in the study group, and selects the participants who are most suitable for the purpose of the study and that he or she thinks have a wealth of knowledge and experience in the study. In this way, it is possible to maximize the efficiency to be obtained from the interviews and to ensure data diversity. In this regard, Patton (2014) also states that by creating a relatively small sample group with maximum diversity characteristics, unique details about each situation included in the sample can be defined, and from this point of view, common aspects that can be observed between situations that show great differences can be revealed. For this reason, in this study, which was conducted to descriptively examine the service recovery strategies implemented by employees in food and beverage businesses in the face of service failures that cause customer dissatisfaction, the participants were determined by the purposeful sampling method. In this direction, a semi-structured interview form (7 closed and 8 open-ended questions) was prepared to be used in the interviews by the researchers. With the pre-test in which a small group (5 people) was included in the created questionnaire, it was checked whether the questions were clearly understood or not. The finalized interview forms were applied to restaurant employees in various positions in tourism centers in different regions (Istanbul, Izmir, Antalya, Mugla, Nevşehir, Hatay) of Turkey, as they welcome domestic and foreign customers. Between August 19 - 24, 2022, 25 people were reached via Google form and 20 valid forms were obtained. In the research, the participants were given the codes P1,

P2, P3,...P20 and interpretations were made with these codes throughout the research. The open-ended questions asked to the participants in the semi-structured interview form are listed in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Interview Questions

Q1. What are the service failures that cause customer dissatisfaction in your business?
Q2. How do customers express their dissatisfaction?
Q3. Through which channels do customers express their dissatisfaction?
Q4. What is the most common customer type and gender in customer dissatisfaction?
Q5. What recovery strategies do you implement in case of service failures?
Q6. What are the similarities and differences in the dissatisfaction of your local and foreign customers?
Q7. Do the recovery strategies you apply differ depending on whether the customers are local or foreign?
Q8. According to you, what is the most important factor to minimize customer dissatisfaction?

## 2.2. Analysis of Data

Descriptive analysis was used to examine the data collected. In a descriptive analysis, the collected data can be organized according to predetermined themes or themes that emerged from the research questions, or it can be presented according to the dimensions and questions that emerged from the observation and interview processes. Direct quotes are often used in descriptive analysis to convey the opinions of the people whose views are being observed or interviewed. This type of analysis aims to present the results to the reader in a structured and understandable way, first describing the information collected for this purpose in a clear and methodical way, then explaining and interpreting

it, examining causal relationships, and drawing conclusions (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). The participant-created codes were identified through an analysis of the data collected for this study. The codes generated by the participants were collected under themes and grouped based on common attributes. The generated tables were interpreted, and the collected data were directly cited.

## 3. Results

In order to determine some descriptive information of the participants, answers were sought to questions such as gender, educational status, position in the restaurant, income and working time. The descriptive information of the participants is given in Table 2.

According to the findings in Table 2; it is seen that 85.0% of the participants are male, 40.0% have a monthly income of 5000-9000 TL, 50.0% are undergraduate and 70% work in managerial positions. In addition, it is seen that the majority of the participants are those who have worked in restaurants (70.0%), between 1-5 years (55.0%) and who have 11-20 years (45.0%) experience in the sector.

Service failures that cause customer dissatisfaction were evaluated in six categories. It has been stated that the most common service failures in businesses are the taste of food, service speed and price. Some of the participant statements regarding service errors are as follows: "...*The desire to choose a table, dislike of the place (P2), cold or tasteless food (P3), the delays in the service (P11), the fact that the customers are unfamiliar with our tastes and our portions are too much. (P12), the attitude of the waiters and problems with food and beverages (P18), high prices (P15).*..."

**Table 2.** Identification Information of the Participants

Information		f	%
<b>Gender</b>	Female	3	15,0
	Male	17	85,0
<b>Education</b>	High School	7	35,0
	Associate degree	2	10,0
	Undergraduate	10	50,0
	Postgraduate	1	5,0
<b>Position</b>	Restaurant Manager	14	70,0
	Restaurant Supervisor	2	10,0
	Supervisor Assistant	2	10,0
	Waiter	2	10,0
<b>Monthly Income</b>	Less than 5000 TL	5	25,0
	Between 5000 - 9000 TL	8	40,0
	10.000 TL and above	7	35,0
<b>Type of Business</b>	Restaurant	14	70,0
	Café & Restaurant	6	30,0
<b>Working Period in the Current Restaurant</b>	Between 1-5 years	11	55,0
	Between 6-10 years	3	15,0
	11 years and above	6	30,0
<b>Total Experience in the Sector</b>	Between 3-10 years	7	35,0
	Between 11-20 years	9	45,0
	21 years and above	4	20,0

It is seen that the participants evaluated the symptoms of customer dissatisfaction in the restaurant in four categories (verbal expression, angry/unhappy facial expression, not coming to restaurant again, leave the restaurant without finish the food) (Table 3, Theme 2). Some participant expressions are as follows: "...Leave the restaurant without finish the food (P1), harsh facial expression (P6), angry looks (P7), speak rudely (P11), We can understand from their expressions and behaviours (P16), they do not come to the restaurant again (P18)..."

The channels through which customers express their dissatisfaction are respectively; face-to-face, social media, telephone and restaurant website. Some participants stated that there are more than one complaint way (theme 3). "...Face to face, social media and phone mostly (P3), Face-to-face and via social media (P11), Phone and social media (P14), via social media and the restaurant website (P15), face to face and make comments on social media platforms (P18)..."

The resulting coding for the types of customers where dissatisfaction is seen; conscious customer, impatient customer, middle-aged customer and rich customer. On the other hand, gender dissatisfaction is 40.0% for female and 15.0% for male. Similarly, the rate of dissatisfaction in both genders is 45.0% (Table 3, Theme 4). "...Both genders, impatient customer type (P1), Generally conscious people (P9), People who are usually in a hurry and male customers (P11), There is no differ between genders, all customer who do not receive service in line with their expectations can complain (P16), Usually middle-aged and female customers (P18)..."

In general, service recovery strategies towards customer dissatisfaction; apologize (60.0%), void check or bill (20.0%),

offer complimentary food or beverage (15.0%) were categorized under codes (Table 4, Theme 5). The expressions regarding the service recovery strategies towards customer dissatisfaction are as follows: "First of all, apologize, offer complimentary food or beverage then void check or bill if they are not satisfied (P1), our attitudes are always the same. We try to be as courteous as possible and help resolve the issue. If we can't communicate, we void check or bill (P3), Offer complimentary food or beverage (P6), we definitely try to solve the problem. We take the necessary measures to avoid getting the same complaint (P10), Trying to soften the problem (P11), Listening to the complaint and offer complimentary food. If they are not satisfied we void the check (P15), we ask how we will compensate. If they are convinced, we offer complimentary food or prepare the order again (P18) ...".

According to the participants, there is a difference (65.0%) rather than similarity in the dissatisfaction of domestic and foreign customers. Some participants stated that both customer profiles are the same (25.0%) (Table 4, Theme 6). The remarkable comments in the participant statements are given below: "...As for the attitude, the domestic and foreign customers are the same (P1), domestic customer tends to complain constantly and they do not have knowledge about the food culture. On the other hand foreigners are more understanding (P2), In this case, their attitudes are not much different. Situations such as; ask to change the order or leave the restaurant observed (P3), Domestic customers generally do not accept mistakes, foreigners are more moderate if there is no ulterior motive (P5), Foreigners are more polite than domestic customers (P6), In general Domestic customers are dissatisfied with indifference while foreign customers are dissatisfied with delays of the orders (P7), Domestic customers demand a lot of detail for example, ask to change the ingredients of the order

**Table 3.** Descriptive Analysis of Theme 1 to 4

<b>1. Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Topics of service failure	Food taste	6	30,0
	Service speed	5	25,0
	Price	4	20,0
	Waiters	3	15,0
	Seating	2	10,0
	Too big or too small portions	1	5,0
<b>2. Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
The way of expressing dissatisfaction	Verbal expression	7	35,0
	Angry/unhappy facial expression	6	30,0
	Not coming to restaurant again	5	20,0
	Leave the restaurant without finish the food	3	15,0
<b>3. Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
Channels for expressing dissatisfaction	Face-to-face	14	70,0
	Social media	12	60,0
	Phone	8	40,0
	Restaurant website	7	35,0
<b>4. Theme</b>	<b>Codes</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
The most common customer type and gender in customer dissatisfaction	Female	8	40,0
	Male	3	15,0
	Both genders	9	45,0
	Conscious customer	6	30,0
	Impatient customer	5	25,0
	Middle-aged customer	3	15,0
	Rich customer	2	10,0

and presentation of the plate. So that forces the kitchen staff and delays the orders. Foreigners are generally very clear with their order and happy what they get (P9), Domestic customers are definitely not happy without local food products, foreigners are more open to new tastes (P10), there are more problems with domestic customers. They are always in more of a hurry and expect more special attention. This attitude is almost absent in foreign customers (P11), our domestic customers display a more aggressive attitude. Our foreign customers criticize more constructively (P15), generally, the locals complain. Foreigners do not complain at all (P19), while the domestic customer complains about the price, the foreigner pays more. While foreign customers demand quality and delicious food, local customers want both quality and affordable menu (P20)...”.

70.0% of the participants stated that there is no difference in their service recovery strategies in the face of domestic and foreign customers, while 30.0% stated that there is a difference (Table 4, Theme 7). Some noteworthy participant statements are as follows: “... Yes, since domestic customers talk threateningly as a result of dissatisfaction, it is necessary to speak more carefully (P2), Of course, we sometimes treat domestic and foreign customers differently (P3), Absolutely yes. While Turks are open to a more friendly approach, foreigners are generally serious (P10), we can express ourselves more easily to the locals (P11), it doesn't matter to me whether the customer is domestic or foreign. The important thing is that the customers leave the restaurant happy and make positive comment to other people (P15) ...”.

The most important factors in eliminating customer dissatisfaction are gathered in 5 categories (Table 4, Theme 8). According to the participants, the most important factors are; effective communication (60.0%) and conduct staff training (25.0%). Some participant views on the subject are as follows; “... Working with qualified staff and using fresh products (P3), Questioning what you do and being open to criticism eliminates all dissatisfaction over time (P5), Being an experienced waiter who takes the right order (P6), qualified staff (P7), Providing the expected service to the customer in the best way (P9),

Understanding the real problem and focusing on the solution. Show that you care about the customer (P10), you need to show that you really care about the problem and try to solve it (P11), Effective communication (P12, P16, P18, P19) ...”

#### 4. Conclusion and Suggestion

Increasing competition in food and beverage businesses, which meet the nutritional needs of individuals and one of the important elements of the service sector, has caused the issues of satisfaction / dissatisfaction to become more important for businesses. Because of this, the purpose of this study is to characterize the service failures that cause customer dissatisfaction in food and beverage businesses and the applied service recovery strategies.

As a result of the research, it has been determined that service failure that cause customer dissatisfaction is mostly experienced in “food taste” (30%), “service speed” (25%), and “price” (20%). These results are similar to the study results of Hwang & Zhao (2010), Kaya (2018), Şengül et al., (2018), Kitapçı (2008), Koçoğlu & Kıyıcı (2018), Özbay & Sarıca (2020). In addition, in the research, it was found that the employees apply service recovery strategies such as “apologize (60%)”, “void check or bill (20%)”, “offer complimentary food or beverage (15%)” and “offer to make new order (5%) in the face of dissatisfaction. In the study of Özbay & Sarıca (2020), it was determined that one of the behaviours exhibited by some of the employees in the face of customer dissatisfaction is to apologize.

It was determined that the customers in the restaurant mostly expressed their dissatisfaction verbally (35%) and with a normal voice tone (50%). Although it is seen as a negative situation by the restaurant that the customers express their dissatisfaction verbally, that is, they state their complaints, it actually offer to restaurant the opportunity to recognize their flaws and faults and fix them. Considering, evaluating and correcting these complaints will create a feeling that their ideas are respected in customers and make them feel valued.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Analysis of Theme 5 to 8

5. Theme	Codes	f	%
Recovery strategies applied in case of service failure	Apologize	12	60,0
	Void check or bill	4	20,0
	Offer complimentary food or beverage	3	15,0
	Offer to make new order	1	5,0
6. Theme	Codes	f	%
Similarities and Differences in Dissatisfaction of Domestic and Foreign Customers	There is a difference rather than a similarity	13	65,0
	Both types of customers are the same	5	25,0
	Unanswered	2	10,0
7. Theme	Codes	f	%
Differences in recovery strategies according to domestic and foreign customers	Yes	6	30,0
	No	14	70,0
8. Theme	Codes	f	%
The most important factor to minimize customer dissatisfaction	Effective communication	12	60,0
	Conduct staff training	5	25,0
	Going above and beyond to make customers “WOW”	3	15,0
	Affordable price of menu	1	5,0
	Use of fresh product	1	5,0

These customers will also be more likely to revisit the business rather than switch businesses or engage in negative word of mouth.

Within the scope of the research, it has been observed that customers mostly convey their dissatisfaction face-to-face and through social media channels. Other channels used are the telephone and the restaurant website. In the study conducted by Özbay & Sarıca (2020), it was determined that the customers reported their complaints mostly online and verbally as a result of their dissatisfaction. Expressing the customer's dissatisfaction face-to-face before leaving the restaurant gives the operators the opportunity to solve the problem at that moment and thus contributes to the satisfaction of the customers by the businesses. Customers' reporting their dissatisfaction in writing via social media or the business's website carries a risk for businesses as these comments or complaints reach more people. In this case, the operator or employee must respond to such comments, state that he will deal with the related problem immediately, and provide the customer with the necessary information in solving the problem.

When looking at whether the customers who expressed their dissatisfaction differ according to their gender, most of the individuals involved (45%) said that, they experienced dissatisfaction in both genders, 40% only female and 15% only male. In the studies conducted by Kitapçı (2008) and Albayrak (2013), it has been determined that male are the ones who complain the most as a result of their dissatisfaction.

"Are there similarities and differences in the dissatisfaction of domestic and foreign customers?" The majority of the participants (65%) stated that there are differences, that foreign customers are more tolerant and kinder in the face of problems and disruptions, and that domestic customers are more angry and harsh when expressing their dissatisfaction. In addition, the majority of those taking part (70%) said that the fact that the customers are domestic or foreign does not make any difference in their attitudes and behaviours.

The measures taken by the employees to deal with customer dissatisfaction are listed as conduct staff training, try exceeding their expectations, offer complimentary food or beverage, void check or bill, offer discount, solicit written or online feedback. Although it is said that staff training is important (30%), 50% of the participants stated that they did not receive training on customer dissatisfaction. The most important factors to minimize customer dissatisfaction were determined as effective communication (60%) and qualified staff (25%). These results reveal the importance of both effective communication and qualified staff. Thanks to the conduct staff training by the experts on the relevant subjects, the employees will be able to better understand the importance of the subject and will know how to act in the most correct way in the face of dissatisfaction. For this reason, both owners and managers should give more importance to conduct staff training.

This study has some limitations. Due to the qualitative methodological approach employed in this study, a limited

number of participants were involved in its conduct. Therefore, future research can be conducted with quantitative methods to reach more participants. In addition, this study was carried out only on food and beverage businesses. In the future, it is recommended that studies on this subject be carried out in different businesses of tourism sector.

**Ethical Statement:** For the interview method used in this study, permission was obtained from Mustafa Kemal University Ethics Committee with the decision numbered 28 in its meeting dated 18/08/2022 and numbered 2022/09. In case of a contrary situation, TO&RE Journal has no responsibility and all responsibility belongs to the author (s) of the study.

**Author Contribution Statement:** All authors contributed equally to the article.

**Declaration of Interest:** There is no conflict of interest

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