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The Impact of Service Recovery Strategies and Justice Theory upon Customer Satisfaction in Airline Industry of Pakistan.

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With the rapid growth of the services industry in Pakistan which is more than fifty percent of GDP, organizations focus more on their service recovery strategies to keep high the level of customer satisfaction. The basic theme of this research is to judge the customer satisfaction with respect to the elements of Justice Theory (Distributional, Interactional and Procedural Justice) and Service Recovery Strategies, SRS (Apology, Compensation, and Speed). For this purpose, the data is collected with the help of a questionnaire from 115 passengers at Peshawar Airport Pakistan. The results show that all three elements of SRS (Compensation, Speed, and Apology) and two components of Justice Theory (Interactional and Distributive) have a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction. The only element that has shown insignificant value is procedural justice. The results also indicate that the compensation element of service recovery and interactional justice of Justice Theory have a higher impact on customer after facing a service failure from any Airline company during traveling. The findings suggests that companies should invest more in their front desk employees and should have a recovery strategy that has a major focus on compensation - an element of justice theory – for losses.

**Keywords**: Airlines, Customer Satisfaction, Justice Theory, Pakistan, Service Recovery Strategies.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Organizations try to provide quality service to their customers, there might be times when the service could not be delivered as promised which create a failure. At some point, the dissatisfaction of customers might not be due to the failure but due to non-resolving behavior of the company (Fan et al., 2010). Sometimes, the customer expects more from the company while in reality, the company does not offer the desired services so the customer might get frustrated and may switch to another service provider.

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ABSTRACT

Service failure is the occurrence of not providing the promised service to its customers at the time of sale or after-sale. These failures, sometimes, may lead to significant dissatisfaction of customers i.e., a person who might lose a job or business contract due to delay at the airport or in the airline. In such failures, the company must have a proper recovery strategy to overcome the losses or minimize its impact. For the satisfaction of customers, companies have different strategies to recover from these failures (Boshoff & Staude, 2003) known as Service Recovery Strategies (SRS); the SRS are the efforts made by the company to overcome such failures (Gronroos, 1988). Good recovery strategy shows the company's willingness to help their customers in various instances. There are many occasions where airlines fail to deliver properly –sometimes the flight gets delayed, luggage gets lost, no proper service at the counter and in the plan, a customer does not get his desired seat and many more. Every airline has its own way of dealing with such incidents. Some only apologize to its customers while some not only apologize but also compensate their customers in different manners. This research analyzes the important factors of SRS that are necessary for Airline companies of Pakistan in case of failure in service delivery. Customer satisfaction, being the primary priority of all organizations, is chosen as a dependent variable while SRS (Apology, Compensation, and Speed) and components of Justice Theory (Distributional, Interactional and Procedural Justice) are independent variables.

The data is collected using an adapted questionnaire developed by Ramadan (2012). Data is collected from customers who have traveled by air to/from Pakistan and have faced the failure of promised services. These customers are asked about their experiences with the airline and its recovery strategies in case of a failure.

The remainder of the paper is as follow. Section 1 is about introduction followed by a literature review in Section 2. Section 3 highlights the methodology while Section 4 is about data analysis and results.

# 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researchers have done work on SRS and Justice Theory. It is necessary for organizations to have a backup plan such as SRS for the occurrence of any failure in

services. These backup plans work as a guide for customers to have or not to have interaction with the service providers. SRS is defined as any action taken by organizations and their workers to overcome any loss to customers happen due to failure (Gronroos, 1988). These actions may be in the form of compensation, apology or problem acknowledgment (Kelley et al., 1993). As discussed by Kim et al. (2009), the bond of the service provider and the customer can be made even stronger if there is a good and on-time SRS. Michel & Meuter (2008) argued that it is better to have an error-free service but if that is not possible then it does not mean that customer satisfaction cannot be regained with proper SRS.

There are four types of complainers as identified by Zeithaml et al. (2006). For example, (i) Passives, non-complainers; (ii) VOICERS, known as Best Friends as they are the loyal ones; (iii) IRATES, shifters without complaining and spread negative word of mouth, WOM; (iv) Activist, who complain to all parties. Handling of complaints is a tricky part. The reaction of customers towards service failure and its recovery is different. It mostly depends on the loss they had faced due to failure. Companies need to understand the loss of customers and have to react accordingly (Yi & Lee, 2005). According to Zhu et al. (2004), failure might not be due to the company, sometimes a customer expects more from the company and the inability to fulfill their expectation lead to a service failure. Sometimes a mere apology can work as a recovery strategy and sometimes a company has to compensate the losses to overcome the failure; in any case, the failure cannot be neglected (Cranage, 2004). Companies cannot always predict the failure until it is brought into their attention by customers' complaints. With the help of these complaints, the company can provide them with proper recovery plans. Organizations have to encourage their customers to complain about service failure and a company should respond to them (Ennew & Schoefer, 2004)

Customer's complaints differ with the investment on stake. If the loss is higher, the complaint rate is high and the demand for an ethical and proper solution prevails in the mind of customers. With proper recovery strategy, customer satisfaction can be gained easily (Alexander, 2002). It is often seen that some customers always complain without having a genuine reason. In this regard, Forrester & Meute (2001) documented

that managers do not have to apologize for everything until the complaint is relevant and have caused damage of any sort. SRS helps managers to safeguard themselves from objections faced due to failures. As discussed by Bhandari and Polonsky (2007), recovery strategies should be tailored made, for different failures, keeping in mind the severity and loss due to failure. Company's best strategy should be avoiding the occurrence of a failure in the first place; less failure would lead to greater satisfaction and more loyal customers (McDougall & Levesque, 2000). At certain times, failure in service acts as a blessing in disguise. If customers are treated fairly and the recovery strategy exceeds the expectation of customers, it results in loyal customers and get positive WOM in return. This phenomenon of service recovery that exceeds customer satisfaction is known as 'Service Recovery Paradox' (Hart et al., 1990).

Richins (1980) has pointed out that sometimes customers do not complain in case of failure as they think that a company might not view it as a genuine fault and they might face disappointment. This has further been explained by Halstead et al., (1996), besides the fact that customers are afraid of getting a negative response from the company about a failure and many customers switching over without complaints. Gaining customers trust back can be tricky sometimes as some customers tend to be loyal towards other service providers and might not stay even after receiving good recovery strategy (Kau & Wan-Yiun Loh 2006).

Importance of complaints was spotted by Kim et al., (2003) who stated that companies should have proper complaint centers which address the shortcomings in the services delivery. Organizations have to create a separate department to handle complaints and train their employees to have enough knowledge about companies' policies and procedures to handle different complaints. As discussed by Hassan et al., (2014), employees play a significant role in recovery strategies. A quick response from employees towards failure has a good impression. The customer caring staff should be trained to deal with customers in different situations and provide them a proper recovery plan through efficient procedure. This would help to regain the confidence of customers that leads to satisfaction and loyalty (Michel et al., 2007).

Kim et al. (2009) also argued that the commitment and trust of customers on any

service provider is influenced by the perception of justice towards recovery efforts where trust of a customer acts as a mediator in this process. These perceptions towards recovery process consist of three elements, such as Interactional, Procedural and Distributive justice (Ha & Jang, 2009). The perception of customers to have fairness in a process is known as distributive justice (Casado-Diaz et al., 2006). The perception towards procedures of a firm is known as procedural justice (Lind et al., 1995). The perception towards dealings of customers is known as interactional justice (McCole-Keneddy & Sparks, 2003).

The effect of each element differs in different cases as in retail bank industry interactional justice has a higher impact on customer satisfaction than the other two elements (Assefa, 2014). But in airline and telecom industry distributive justice shows the higher impact on customer satisfaction keeping corporate image as moderating factor (Nikbin et al., 2011). In the banking, industry customer has higher interaction with employees of the bank so if those employees have not been equipped with proper knowledge and techniques to handle customers in failure, a customer might switch to other bank. In airline and telecom industries, customers tend towards distributive justice and compensation as they want to recover the losses they have gained due to the failure of the company (Migacs et al., 2018).

This research tries to tease out the impact of Justice Theory (Distributional Justice, Interactional Justice, and Procedural Justice) and SRS (Apology, Compensation, and Speed) on customer satisfaction in the Airline industry of Pakistan.

Two hypotheses have been generated based on a literature review.

- **H**<sub>1</sub>: Three elements of SRS (Apology, Compensation, and Speed) have a positive impact on customer satisfaction in case of a failure of service in the Airline industry in Pakistan.
- **H**<sub>2</sub>: Three elements of Justice Theory (Distributional, Interactional and Procedural) have a positive impact on customer satisfaction in case of a failure of service in the Airline industry in Pakistan

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data is collected using a ready-made questionnaire adopted by Ramazan (2012). The security issue and non-cooperation of the customers compel the researchers to have a

questionnaire survey with 115 customers who faced failure in service delivery. The personally administrated questionnaires were filled at Bacha Khan Airport Peshawar in the months of November-December 2015. The questionnaire is divided into three key parts: Justice Theory, SRS, and Customer Satisfaction related to flight. The questionnaires were distributed among customers who had faced a failure in service delivery by any of the Airline companies. The first section of the questionnaire was related to the flight experience of the customers whether they had faced any failure or not. The second section included the components of SRS: speed, apology, and compensation followed by elements of Justice Theory: interactional, procedural and distributive justice. The third section was about their overall flight experience followed by demographic information about the respondents.

The questionnaire items are measured through five points (1-5) Likert scale, where 1 shows strongly disagree and 5 represents as strongly agree. As the questionnaire is adapted, we assume that there is no issue with the validity. However, Cronbach's Alpha is used to measure reliability. The relationship between variables is measured through correlation technique and conclusions are based on the results taken from the regression analysis.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the Customers (N=115)					
Demographic	Item	Number of	Percentage		
		Respondents			
Gender	Male	84	73%		
	Female	31	27%		
Age	18-30 Years	44	38.3%		
	31-45 Years	36	31.3%		
	46-59 Years	25	21.7%		
	60+ Years	10	8.7%		
Job/Profession	Student	24	20.7%		
	Employee (Private and Public	72	62.1%		
	Sector)				
	Housewife	9	7.8%		
	Retired	3	2.6%		
	Self-Employed	7	6%		
Education	High School or Lower	29	25%		
	Bachelors	29	25%		
	Masters	44	37.9%		
	MS/PhD	13	11.2%		

Demographic information of the respondents is shown in Table 1. Greater diversity can be seen in all aspects of demography, which includes gender, age, profession, and education. The number of male respondents is 73% as compared to female respondents (i.e., 27%). The reason for a higher number of the male respondent is due to culture and norm of the region; female normally does not travel alone in this region and are not allowed to talk to strangers without the presence of their companions. The Table also shows that all the respondents are over the age of 18 years, 38 percent of the respondents are in the age group of 18-30, 31 percent from the age group 31-45, 22percent from the age group 46-59, and around 9 percent are over 60 years of age. The Table shows that most of the respondents were employed having a percentage of 62 as compared to other respondents such as student (21 percent), housewives (9 percent), retired (3 percent) and self-employed (6 percent). Most of the respondents are educated where 25 percent have completed high school or lower, 25 percent of the respondents have a Bachelor degree, 38 percent have Master degree, and 11 percent have either MPhil or Ph.D. degree.

The study employs customer satisfaction as a dependent variable while components of Justice Theory (Distributional, Interactional and Procedural Justice) and Service Recovery Strategies, SRS (Apology, Compensation, and Speed) as independent variables.

# 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1: Reliability Analysis

Table 1 shows the reliability of each variable, the number of items used and their inter reliability. For variables to have the inter-term consistency it should have  $\alpha > 0.6$ . The Table shows that the value of  $\alpha$  is 0.91 for compensation, 0.89 for speed, 0.78 for an apology, 0.89 for distributive justice, 0.89 for interactional justice, and 0.88 for procedural justice. All values of Cronbach's Alpha are more than 0.6 for all six variables which refer to the items of each variable have consistency to measure its respective theme.

Table 1: Reliability Test					
Variables	Cronbach's α	Items	Results		
Service recovery compensation	0.915	4	Reliable		
Service recovery Speed	0.895	4	Reliable		
Service Recovery Apology	0.785	4	Reliable		
Distributive Justice	0.895	5	Reliable		
Interactional Justice	0.898	8	Reliable		
Procedural Justice	0.885	8	Reliable		

#### **4.2 Correlation Results**

Table 2 shows the Person Correlation analysis. The values in this table shows the relationship between the variables and also give some indication about multicollinearity among variables. As the Table indicates that the values of all variables are above 0.60 showing that the relationship between all the variables is significant and positive. For service recovery, the compensation element has shown the highest significance and for justice theory Interactional justice shows the highest correlation with customer satisfaction. The Table also indicates that all the values of the correlation coefficient are lower than 0.90 which refers to have no issue of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2006).

Table 2: Correlation							
VARIBALES	CS	SRC	SRS	SRA	DJ	PJ	IJ
Customer Satisfaction	1						
Service Recovery Compensation	0.764	1					
Service Recovery Speed	0.725	0.798	1				
Service Recovery Apology	0.695	0.651	0.585	1			
Distributional Justice	0.726	0.752	0.725	0.716	1		
Procedural Justice	0.748	0.803	0.730	0.644	0.730	1	
Interactional Justice	0.754	0.706	0.749	0.632	0.702	0.813	1

Note: CS (Customer Satisfaction), SRC (Service Recovery Compensation), SRS (Service Recovery Speed), SRA (Service Recovery Apology), DJ (Distributive Justice), PJ (Procedural Justice), IJ (Interactional Justice)

#### 4.3 Regression Analysis

Before analysing the results of regression, it is important to look for assumptions of normality of the residuals. The P-P Plot1 shows that the data is normally distributed and qualified for the analysis of regression.

Table 4: Regression Analysis				
F Statistics based on ANOVA	p-value	R		$\mathbb{R}^2$
44.661	0.000	0.844		0.713
Variables	Coefficients (β)	t-stats	p-value	VIF
Constant	0.725	3.23	0.002	
Service Recovery Compensation (SRC)	0.361	2.59	0.011	3.821
Service Recovery Speed (SRS)	0.390	2.85	0.020	4.070
Service Recovery Apology (SRA)	0.322	2.62	0.010	2.289
Distributive Justice (DJ)	0.415	3.04	0.003	3.238
Procedural Justice (PJ)	0.059	1.33	0.737	5.024
Interactional Justice (IJ)	0.401	2.90	0.004	3.337

Table 4 shows the regression analysis of the study. The value of R2 is 0.71 which shows that customer satisfaction has been explained 71% by components of SRS (Compensation, Speed, and Apology) and the elements of Justice Theory (Distributional, Interactional and Procedural Justice). Table 4 also indicates that all the values of VIF (Variation Inflation Factor) are small and there is no serious issue of multi-collinearity; we assume that the estimated coefficients are reliable.

Table 4 shows the significance of each variable with the help of p-value and t-stats. The first item in the Table is a constant term. The beta ( $\beta$ ) value of constant is 0.725 which shows that if SRC, SRA, SRS, DJ, PJ, and IJ are held zero then the customer satisfaction remains 0.725. Both t-stats (3.23) and p-value (0.002) show that the constant is significant at 1% level of significance. All other variables, except procedural justice, are also positively significant at 5% level of significance. Procedural justice is the only variable that shows no significant relationship with customer satisfaction in this study.

The beta ( $\beta$ ) value of SRC (0.361) is significant and it shows that if the value of SRC changes by 1, it causes 0.361 change in customer satisfaction. This result makes the first hypothesis of the study accepted that is compensation for a failure has a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The data is available on request.

positive relationship with customer satisfaction. The results of the study are inconsistent with Ramadan (2012). Every airline uses different means of compensation to satisfy customers for a particular failure. Proper employee interaction and compensating the losses of customers lead towards repurchase intention (Matilla and Cho, 2011). The significant coefficient of SRS (i.e., 0.390) shows that if the value of SRS changes by 1, it leads to 0.390 change in customers satisfaction. This result accepts the hypothesis that speeding the recovery process after a failure has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. It refers that expediting the recovery process with minimum procedures leads to customer satisfaction. The result is in accordance with the study of Ramadan (2012). The significant value of SRA (0.322) shows that a change in the value of SRA by 1 leads to 0.322 change in customer satisfaction. These results comply with our hypothesis that apologizing for failure has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. The study is in relation to that of Cranage (2004) whose results showed that quick interaction by employees via apology and address these issues after failure leads to customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Ramadan (2012) also found a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and apology.

The relationship between distributive justice and customer satisfaction is significant positive with a beta ( $\beta$ ) value of DJ as 0.415. It refers that if the value of DJ changes by 1, it causes 0.415 change in customer satisfaction. It refers that the longer the service provider takes to solve a problem, the lower the customer satisfaction is (Nikbin et al., 2011; Ramadan, 2012; Migacs et al., 2018).

The beta ( $\beta$ ) of PJ is 0.059 with the p-value of 1.33 and t-value of 0.737, it refers that this coefficient is insignificant in relationship to customer satisfaction. The results show no significant effect of procedural justice on customer satisfaction which is in contradiction with previous researchers like Severt (2002); Migacz et al, 2018; Kim et al. (2009); Ramadan (2012). This insignificant relationship may be due to local culture and norms. Most of the passengers wish that their problems should be solved on the spot instead of going into long procedures in-service failure. The third element of justice theory (interactional justice) has a significant positive relationship with customer satisfaction with the beta ( $\beta$ ) value of 0.401 (Nikbin et al. 2011; Ramadan, 2012; Micagz

et al, 2018). This result supports the importance of a well-trained front desk employee who addresses the complaints on the spot. If angry customers are not treated well after a failure, the company may lose those customers forever. Berry et al. (1994) and Severt (2002) identified that investing in frontline employees through time and money makes them more polite, honest and quick responsive that lead towards positive perception of interactional justice.

The results show that all the elements of SRS (Compensation, Speed, and Apology) and two components of Justice Theory (Interactional and Distributive) have a strong positive relationship with customer satisfaction. The only variable that has no relationship with customer satisfaction is Procedural Justice. We deduce the importance of front desk employees from the insignificant value of procedural justice and significant value of interactional justice. An active front desk employee can address the complaints of the passengers on the spot instead of going in the procedure which is bad for both company and customers. The reason is that customers do not want to listen to the company's policies while they had a failure rather want immediate solutions to their problems with good attitude from the company representatives.

# 5. CONCLUSION

The research analyzes the effects of SRS and justice theory on the customer satisfaction in airline sector of Pakistan. The data is collected with the help of 115 questionnaires from the passengers who faced failure in services. The results show that all elements of SRS (Compensation, Speed, and Apology) and two components of Justice Theory (Interactional and Distributive) have a significant relationship with customer satisfaction. While Procedural justice shows no significant relationship with customer satisfaction. Customers perceive that they should be properly treated and compensated for their losses on the spot after a failure in service.

The result of the study also shows that one element of service recovery (i.e., compensation) and one element of justice theory (i.e., interactional justice) have a high relationship with customer satisfaction, based on their coefficients. Those customers who are treated well by the front desk employees and are provided with proper knowledge

about the failure and recovery plans show a higher level of satisfaction. On the other hand, the customers show a higher level of satisfaction who are compensated for their losses. Companies should invest more in their front desk employees and to train them with soft-spoken language to manage the grievances of customers in a decent manner. Companies can also provide different compensation packages to those who face any failure i.e., a window/aisle seat with customer choice, extra lunch or hotel stay, etc., these activities help company gain the lost trust and make the customers even more loyal.

The result of the study can be generalized to other service industries as well. The study contributes to suggest the service industry that they should make a recovery strategy that is more focused on the elements that enhance customer satisfaction i.e., service recovery compensation and interaction justice.

Future researches can be based by including other independent variables such as Word of Mouth, repurchase intention and customer loyalty. Perception of customers towards a particular service provider before and after failure can also be analyzed in future researches. Using different statistical tools, increasing the size of the sample and changing the location of data collection can also be used keeping the same variables in the study.

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