

Clothing Brand Incident Handling Decisions on Consumer Behavior from the Perspective of Service Recovery

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Abstract. In clothing brand service failure scenarios, with the improvement of information dissemination efficiency and the enhancement of consumer perception ability, the choice of event handling timing and service recovery methods by enterprises has gradually become an important factor influencing consumer response and sales conversion. Based on the service recovery theory and the customer forgiveness theory, this paper focuses on the matching mechanism of recovery timing and recovery methods and systematically explores the influence path of consumers' perception of enterprise support, forgiveness willingness, subsequent repurchase willingness and positive word-of-mouth communication willingness. The study used a combination of situational experiments and questionnaires to measure and analyze the relevant variables by constructing control scenarios of different timings and different remedies. The results show that there is a significant interaction between remedies and the timing of handling, and a reasonable match can effectively enhance consumers' perception of support and forgiveness for enterprises, and further promote repurchase behavior and positive word-of-mouth. The study concluded that the timing of remediation plays a key moderating role in service remediation decisions and is an important strategic variable for apparel brands to achieve relationship repair and sales recovery.

Keywords: Clothing Brand, Service Failure, Service Recovery Timing, Service Recovery Method, Consumer Behavior.

1. Introduction

In the context of highly immediate information dissemination and increasing consumer engagement, the service failures and emergent incidents faced by clothing brands in the course of operation are showing a trend of increasing frequency and scale. Consumers not only focus on the service outcome itself, but also pay more attention to the brand's response speed and handling method after the incident occurs. Once a business fails to respond effectively at critical moments, negative reviews can easily spread rapidly through social media platforms, having a lasting impact on brand image and sales performance. In this context, the timing of incident handling and the choice of service remedies have gradually become important factors influencing consumer reactions and behavioral decisions.

It is of great significance to explore the role of service recovery in clothing brand management from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Studies have shown that reasonable service recovery can not only mitigate the negative effects of service failure, but also enhance customer satisfaction and further influence their trust and willingness to forgive the brand. At the same time, in the context of clothing consumption, because the product has a strong experiential attribute and emotional value, consumers' evaluation of the brand is more likely to be influenced by the service process. As a result, service recovery has evolved from a single means of problem repair to an important strategic tool that affects the long-term sales performance of brands.

Based on the above research context, this study focuses on two key independent variables in the service recovery process - the timing of recovery and the way of recovery - and explores the interaction mechanism between them. Most of the existing literature focuses on comparing the effectiveness of different remedies (such as apology versus economic compensation), while the exploration of the variable "remedy timing" is relatively limited. In fact, the same remedy strategy, when implemented at different points in time, can produce significantly different effects. For example, emotional soothing at the early stage of a service failure can help ease customers' negative emotions;

Providing material compensation in subsequent stages is more conducive to restoring their perception of fairness. Such "strategy-timing matching" problems form a key gap in current research [1,2].

In terms of research methods, this paper first uses the literature analysis method to systematically review the research related to service recovery theory and customer behavior in order to clarify the variable definition and theoretical basis. This approach helps to integrate existing research results and construct a clear theoretical analysis framework. Based on this, an empirical research method combining situational experiments and questionnaire surveys was adopted. By designing scenarios of failure in clothing e-commerce customer service and in-store service, and setting up controlled experiments at different times and with different remedies, quantitative analysis was conducted on consumers' perception of enterprise support, willingness to forgive, and subsequent behavior, thereby enhancing the explanatory power and reliability of the research results.

The aim of this study is to reveal how the timing and methods of remediation affect consumers' psychological cognition, thereby influencing their satisfaction, trust level and repurchase intention[3]. To achieve this goal, this paper constructs theoretical models and conducts empirical tests to analyze the optimal combination paths of remedial strategies in different situations, thereby providing theoretical basis and practical inspiration for decision-making optimization of clothing brands in service failure situations.

2. Theoretical basis

Based on the service recovery theory, customer forgiveness theory and perceived enterprise support theory, and in combination with the typical characteristics of service failure in the clothing retail scenario, this study explores the intrinsic logic of service recovery methods, customer satisfaction and customer perceived enterprise support in the clothing industry, and clarifies the theoretical connotations and correlation mechanisms of each core variable in the process of service failure repair of clothing brands. To lay the theoretical foundation for the subsequent empirical analysis, and to complement the theory with the relevant research on after-sales service quality of clothing online stores and improve the theoretical research system of service recovery in the clothing retail field.

2.1. Clothing brand service recovery methods

Service remediation in the clothing retail scenario refers to the targeted response behavior taken by brands after service failure to make up for consumers' losses and repair brand relationships. According to the remediation orientation, it can be divided into two core methods: spiritual compensation and material compensation, and can also form a combined compensation strategy. Mental compensation, centered on emotional repair, includes emotion-oriented measures such as sincere apologies, explanations of the reasons for the mistakes, and professional communication and soothing, which are fundamental means to alleviate consumers' immediate negative emotions; Material compensation is centered on benefit compensation and includes result-oriented measures such as refunds, exchanges, coupons, and physical gifts. It is a key way to make up for the functional loss of consumers. The implementation effects of the two types of remedy methods do not exist independently. Their effectiveness is highly dependent on the fit with the timing of service failure handling. The combination of appropriate remedy methods and handling timing is the core prerequisite for improving the service remedy effect of clothing brands, which echoes the research conclusion that the quality of service remedy in clothing online stores positively affects customer loyalty[4], confirming that the scientific nature of service recovery methods is a key element of service recovery in the apparel retail sector [1,5].

2.2. Customer willingness to forgive

In the context of clothing consumption, customer satisfaction is a comprehensive subjective evaluation of the consumer's experience of brand service. In the case of service failure, the customer's willingness to forgive is the core embodiment of customer satisfaction, which refers to the psychological tendency of consumers to let go of negative emotions, forgive brand mistakes and maintain brand relationship based on brand remedial behavior after experiencing service failure. It is a key mediating variable that links brand service remedying behavior to consumers' subsequent post-purchase behavior [6]. According to the customer forgiveness theory, the formation of consumers' willingness to forgive is directly influenced by brand service remedy behaviors. Positive and appropriate service remedy strategies can effectively enhance consumers' willingness to forgive, while negative and ambiguous remedy behaviors can suppress the generation of willingness to forgive and even further reduce customer satisfaction. The experiential and personalized nature of clothing consumption makes consumers more sensitive to service failure. The strength of their willingness to forgive directly determines the effect of brand and consumer relationship repair and is the core psychological driving force for consumers to engage in positive behaviors such as repurchase and positive communication [7].

2.3. Customer perception of enterprise support

Customer perceived enterprise support is the extent to which consumers subjectively perceive that a brand values their interests, cares about their feelings, and takes responsibility for service failure during their interaction with a clothing brand. It is an important mediating variable for the effect of brand service remedy behavior on consumers' willingness to forgive. According to the theory of perceived enterprise support, the brand's service remedy behavior is the core carrier for conveying support signals to consumers. Positive remedy behavior enables consumers to perceive the brand's responsibility and emphasis on their interests, thereby forming a higher level of perceived enterprise support; Negative remedial actions, on the other hand, make consumers perceive the brand as perfunctory and evasive of responsibility, resulting in a significant reduction in perceived enterprise support. In the context of clothing retail, whether it's the logistics and return services of online stores or the offline services of physical stores, the brand's various remedial measures can affect consumers' perceived level of corporate support, and the adaptability of service remedies to the timing of handling will further strengthen or weaken this perception, while higher customer perceived level of corporate support It can effectively promote the formation of consumers' willingness to forgive, and thus effectively restore the relationship between the brand and the consumer.

3. Case analysis

Cases in the existing literature show that the matching relationship between the timing and approach of implementing service recovery strategies has a significant impact on consumer psychology and behavior. For example, through situational experiments, it was found that in the case of service failure, the different remedial sequences adopted by enterprises, namely "compensation first and then money" and "compensation first and then compensation", would have a differential effect on customers' intention to participate in service remediation. Specifically, in process-oriented service failure scenarios, providing a mental remedy followed by a material remedy can significantly increase customers' willingness to participate in subsequent remedies; In result-oriented service failure scenarios, material remedies followed by mental remedies are more effective and help to enhance customers' positive feedback behavior. The study also found that customer perception of enterprise support plays a mediating role, that is, a reasonable order of remediation can enhance customers' perception of enterprise importance, thereby further promoting their behavioral intention to participate in service remediation [1]. Similar ordering effects have also been observed in the context of intelligent customer service, where empathy plays a mediating role [8]. This case shows that service recovery is not a simple accumulation of a single measure, but rather requires matching the

corresponding sequence of recovery strategies according to the type of service failure to achieve a precise response to the customer's psychological expectations.

Cases in the existing literature further reveal the deep mechanism by which service recovery affects customer loyalty. Using live-streaming e-commerce as the research context, through questionnaire surveys and empirical analysis, it was found that both dimensions of service recovery can significantly positively affect customer loyalty, and sustained trust and consumer forgiveness play partial mediating roles between service recovery and customer loyalty respectively. More importantly, the study confirmed that sustained trust and consumer forgiveness have a chain mediating effect between service remedy and customer loyalty, that is, service remedy first enhances consumers' sustained trust, then stimulates their willingness to forgive, and ultimately promotes the formation of customer loyalty [7]. This case shows that the effect of service remedy is not only reflected in the immediate relief of emotions, but also depends on the long-term rebuilding of consumers' trust in the brand and the arousal of the forgiving mentality, which constitute the key psychological chain from remedial behavior to loyalty transformation.

Cases in the existing literature also explore the impact of the differences in proactiveness of the remedies themselves on consumers' emotions and behavioral intentions. Taking restaurant service failures as an example, a scenario simulation experiment was used to compare the differences in the effects of active and passive remedies. The study found that whether it was a result error or a process error, active remedy, compared with passive remedy, could significantly enhance consumers' positive emotions, reduce negative emotions, and further increase consumers' word-of-mouth willingness and repurchase intention. The study also confirmed that positive emotions were significantly positively correlated with word-of-mouth and repurchase intentions, while negative emotions were significantly negatively correlated with them [9]. This case shows that the initiative of service recovery itself is an important factor influencing consumers' psychological responses. Enterprises should take the initiative to assume responsibility and take remedial measures in a timely manner after service failures occur, rather than passively waiting for customer complaints, so as to more effectively repair consumers' emotions and stimulate their positive behaviors.

3.1. Type of Service Recovery Strategy (independent variable A)

Service Recovery refers to a series of responses taken by an enterprise after a service failure to compensate for the loss of the customer and repair the customer relationship. Existing research generally suggests that service recovery is not a single act, and its effectiveness depends on the type and combination structure of the recovery approach. Existing literature typically categorizes service recovery strategies into emotion-oriented recovery and result-oriented recovery.

In consumer service scenarios, indemnity remedies are more helpful in alleviating customers' emotional dissatisfaction, while indemnity remedies can directly compensate for customers' functional losses [2,9]. Some studies further suggest that the effects of different remedy strategies are not absolutely superior or inferior, but are influenced by a combination of customer psychological interpretation and situational factors [1]. Especially in the context of clothing e-commerce and in-store service, consumers' evaluations of remedy methods are often based on a combined judgment of their commitment to brand responsibility and sincerity in relationship repair.

Based on this, this paper transforms service recovery strategies into different types of recovery methods and explores their impact on customers' psychological responses and subsequent behaviors.

Hypothesis H1: Positive service recovery strategies can significantly increase consumers' willingness to forgive compared to negative or vague approaches.

3.2. The Role of Processing Timing Fit (Context variable T)

Processing timing refers to the speed and stage at which an enterprise takes remedial action after a service failure occurs. Research indicates that the speed of remediation itself is an important factor influencing customer response, and customers often view a quick response as a signal that the company values its own rights [2]. If remedial actions are delayed, even if the compensation is substantial, it may weaken customers' perception of the sincerity of the enterprise and thus affect the remedial effect.

With the increase in the speed of information dissemination, service failure incidents are often perceived and spread by consumers within a short period of time. Studies have shown that consumers are often emotionally sensitive in the early stages of service failure, and whether a company responds promptly at this time will directly affect customers' judgment of the company's motives and attitudes. A timely response is more likely to be interpreted by consumers as a sign of responsibility and respect for customers than a delayed response.

However, timing itself does not work in isolation; the key lies in the fit between the way of handling and the timing. The remedy is more effective when it matches the customer's current psychological needs; Conversely, even if the remedy itself is adequate, a significant delay may undermine its positive effect. Therefore, the timing of handling is not simply "early or late", but an important situational condition that affects the effectiveness of service remediation. Research findings suggest that the effectiveness of remediation varies in different contexts, depending on the degree of fit between the remediation approach and the timing of processing [1].

Hypothesis H2: In situations where the timing of handling is more appropriate, the positive impact of service remedy strategies on consumers' willingness to forgive is stronger.

3.3. Mediating role of perceived enterprise support (mediating variable B1)

Perceived Organizational Support refers to consumers' subjective judgment of whether an enterprise values their interests, cares about their feelings and is willing to take responsibility during the interaction process. Research shows that when companies take clear and responsible remedial actions after service failure, consumers are more likely to form the perception that "the company is on my side," thereby alleviating negative emotions.

In the context of service recovery, different types of strategies and the timing of their implementation will significantly affect consumers' perception of support, thereby influencing their evaluation of the enterprise's motivation and attitude [10]. Especially in clothing e-commerce customer service interactions, the attitude signals conveyed by enterprises through apologies, explanations, and compensations are important antecedent variables influencing consumers' subsequent psychological responses. Higher levels of perceived enterprise support contribute to the formation of customers' willingness to forgive and facilitate the repair of service relationships [7].

Hypothesis H3: The impact of service recovery strategies and the timing of handling on consumers' willingness to forgive mediates through perceived enterprise support.

3.4. Customer forgiveness willingness and consumer behavior outcomes (mediating variable b2 & dependent variable C)

Customer willingness to forgive refers to the psychological tendency of consumers to choose to let go of negative emotions and maintain the relationship based on a re-evaluation of business behavior after experiencing service failure [11]. Research shows that the success of service remediation largely depends on whether the customer is willing to forgive the enterprise rather than the objectivity of the remediation itself [11].

In the context of clothing consumption, the willingness of customers to forgive is regarded as an important psychological intermediary connecting service recovery with subsequent purchase behavior [7].

Hypothesis H4: Consumers' willingness to forgive has a significantly positive impact on their willingness to repurchase.

Hypothesis H5: Consumers' willingness to forgive has a significant positive impact on their willingness to spread positive word-of-mouth.

3.5. Research model

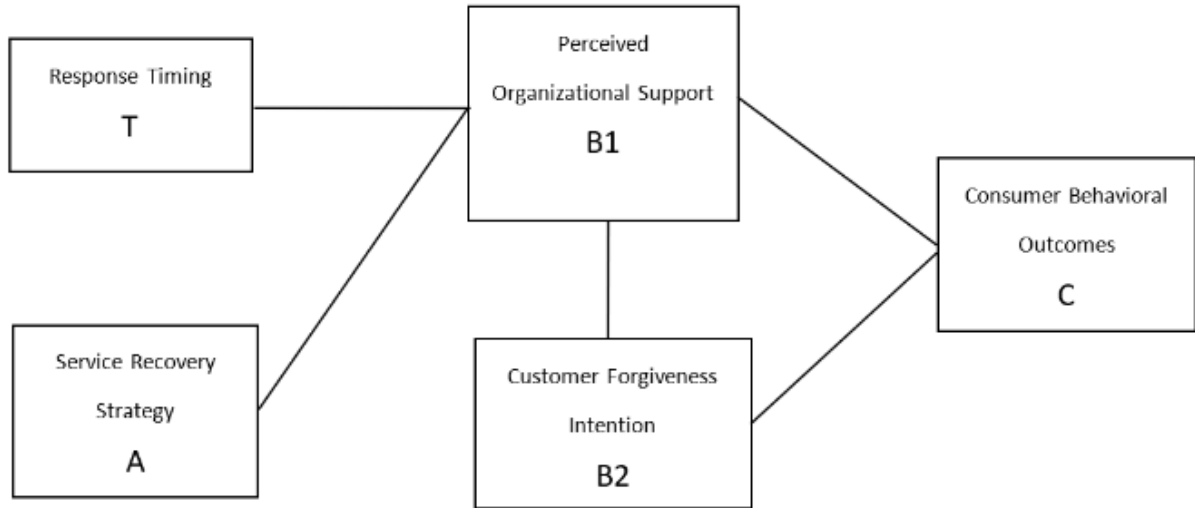


Fig. 1 Conceptual model.

The conceptual framework of this study is shown in Figure 1. As can be seen in Figure 1, service recovery strategy (A) and response timing (T) jointly influence perceived organizational support (B1) and customer forgiveness intention (B2), which further affect consumer behavioral outcomes (C).

4. Research findings

Based on the previous research assumptions, this paper adopts the research method as the case analysis approach to enhance the practical explanatory power and operability of the argument. This study selects typical cases of service failure and remediation in clothing e-commerce enterprises, and conducts an inductive analysis of the actual operations of enterprises around the two core variables of "remediation methods" and "handling timing", thereby exploring the mechanism by which different combinations of strategies affect consumer responses.

This paper selects representative service failure scenarios in clothing e-commerce (such as shipping errors, delayed customer service response, etc.), and organizes and categorizes enterprise remedy strategies through public cases, user reviews, and platform feedback. The key points of analysis include:

- Scenarios in which different remedies are used;

- The impact of response timing on consumer sentiment;

- The effect of remedial strategies on subsequent consumer behavior.

Through an inductive analysis of typical cases, it can be found that there is a clear matching relationship between service recovery methods and handling timing, which have different effects on consumer attitudes and behaviors.

First, in the context of prompt response, enterprises can effectively alleviate consumers' dissatisfaction through active communication and emotional soothing. At this point, mental compensation is more likely to be accepted by consumers, helping to build a responsible corporate image and thereby enhancing consumers' willingness to forgive.

Secondly, in the situation of delayed response, consumers' sense of unfairness and negative emotions have accumulated, and it is difficult to restore trust by relying solely on an apology. At this point, material compensation can, to some extent, make up for the loss and re-establish the sense of fair transaction, which is more effective in restoring consumer evaluations.

Looking further, companies that use combined compensation have shown strong stability in different situations. On the one hand, emotional communication can soothe the mood; On the other hand, actual compensation enhances the credibility of the remedy, which is more conducive to promoting consumers' willingness to repurchase and positive word-of-mouth.

Overall, the case analysis results show that: Service remediation is not a matter of choosing a single strategy, but a matter of matching the "remediation approach - handling timing." A reasonable combination of strategies can lead to better recovery results in different situations.

5. Discussion

This study provides an extended analysis of the effectiveness of service remediation from the perspective of the matching of remediation timing and remediation methods. Unlike previous studies that focused only on remediation methods, this paper highlights the crucial role of the time dimension in service remediation.

Research shows that consumers' psychological needs vary at different stages: they are more inclined towards emotional repair in the early stage of an event, while they pay more attention to benefit compensation in the later stage. This finding suggests that when formulating remedy strategies, companies should dynamically adjust the remedy methods based on the psychological state of consumers rather than adopting a single fixed strategy.

Furthermore, the role of perceived enterprise support as a mediating variable further indicates that service recovery is not only compensation at the behavioral level, but also an important process for rebuilding the relationship between enterprises and consumers. Brands can effectively enhance consumers' perception of support by delivering responsibility and care through timely and appropriate remedial actions, laying the psychological foundation for willingness to forgive and subsequent positive behaviors. The findings of this study are also highly consistent with the industry characteristics of clothing consumption that emphasize experience and emotion, providing a more practical theoretical explanation for service management in the clothing retail scenario.

6. Conclusions

The findings suggest that the matching relationship between service recovery methods and processing timing has a significant impact on consumer behavior. Based on this, it is further concluded that timely mental compensation is more helpful in alleviating negative emotions, while material compensation in delayed situations is more effective in restoring the perception of fairness. The reasonable match between the two can effectively promote the formation of consumers' willingness to forgive and further enhance their willingness to repurchase and positive word-of-mouth behavior.

This study has significant practical implications for clothing brand service management, mainly by providing a theoretical basis for enterprises to formulate differentiated remedial strategies in the case of service failure, which helps to improve the efficiency of consumer relationship repair and sales conversion.

Future research can be further extended to different consumer groups and different brand types to explore the impact of cultural differences, product types and individual consumer characteristics on service recovery effects, thereby enriching the research perspective in the field of service recovery.

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