

The Mediating Role of Service Innovation in Human Practices, Digital Intensity, and Service Recovery Performance

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Abstract: This study examines the relationships between human practices, digital intensity, and service recovery performance. One strategy for improving performance and gaining a competitive edge is digital intensity; nevertheless, there is a dearth of research on the relationship between digital intensity and service innovation. Therefore, to investigate the relationship between the independent factors and the dependent variables, several conventional statistical techniques were used in this study, including a reliability test, descriptive analysis using mean scores, and the multiple regression approach. An online survey was also distributed to managers of 3-star hotels in Malaysia as part of the current study. Overall, the current study found that Leadership, Creative Management, Digital Intensity, and Service Recovery Performance were all mediated by Service Innovation. However, Knowledge Management and People Management significantly predict overall Service Recovery Performance.

Keywords: Human Practices, Digital Intensity, Service Innovation, Service Recovery Performance

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Introduction

Following the independence of Malaysia, the country's GDP has expanded at an average rate of 6.5 percent annually for over 50 years, and industries, commodities, and tourism have always fueled the economy. For instance, RM86.1 billion in tourism revenues from 26.1 million visitors to Malaysia in 2019 helped enhance the country's economy. The top three categories for visitor spending also included retail, lodging, and food and drinks (Tourism, 2020). As such, domestic and foreign tourism depends on the hotel sector; while the tourism sector plans tourist activities like travel, the hotel sector provides services like lodging (Ravishankar & Christopher, 2020). As a result, the hotel business has become one of the top service sectors and a key driver of economic development in Malaysia.

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According to MOTAC's 2019 report, hotels contribute about 24 percent to the country's economy. MOTAC Malaysia is the governing body that maintains the higher tourism system. The significant number of hotels increased from 2017 to 2019. However, although the number of hotels has increased (Statista, 2020), the service quality has not been simultaneously checked. Among several factors, the management of the hotels has been shown to play a poor role in this regard. The hotels need quality services, yet it has been most challenging for hotels in Malaysia to retain their quality services, thus resulting in many complaints and negative feedback from previous customers about service failures. Ultimately, this will negatively impact hotel performance, which impacts the country's economy. Service failure results in customer dissatisfaction and fewer customers, which then translates into lower business sales and profit, leading to the need for service recovery performance.

Additionally, the COVID-19 virus appears to have substantially impacted tourism, mainly due to the grounding of airplanes. Nearly the entire hotel industry was forced out of significant portions of their businesses, and the movement restriction order (MCO) established by every nation constrained the flow of people throughout the world. Under such circumstances, it has become a challenge for existing hotel firms in Malaysia to retain their existing customers and attract new ones, causing a decline in the occupancy rate. Managers' Actions in response to service failures are referred to as service recovery performance (Hewagama, Boxall, Cheung, & Hutchison, 2019). Service recovery performance positively impacts organizations, for example, client loyalty, contentment, favorable word-of-mouth, and purchase intent (Luo, Guchait, Lee, & Madera, 2019).

There is limited research on digital intensity and service innovation in Malaysia and much less on service recovery in this context. For instance, (Luo *et al.*, 2019) examined transformational leadership, while (Hewagama *et al.*, 2019) examined management styles, and (Wang, Guchait, & Paşamehmetoğlu, 2020) examined error tolerance on service recovery performance. While these factors have been shown to affect the effectiveness of service recovery significantly, unfortunately, in the hotel industry, little emphasis has been placed on the importance of digital intensity and service innovation. Therefore, it is important to understand the relationships between human practices (leadership, knowledge management, people management, creativity management), digital intensity, and service recovery performance with service innovation as a mediator encompassing hotels in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Service Recovery Performance

Service recovery performance is the actions managers and employees take in response to service failures (Hewagama *et al.*, 2019). According to (Liat, Mansori, Chuan, & Imrie, 2017), service recovery is considered critical for the success of an organization; therefore, it should be included in every business. Effective service recovery is a crucial element to focus on in hotels. Many scholars have observed that service recovery efforts deliver positive attributes to hotels after failure (Cheng, Gan, Imrie, & Mansori, 2018; Liat *et al.*, 2017; Nwokorie, 2016). Service recovery also improves customers' perceptions of service quality, provides positive word-of-mouth responses, increases customer satisfaction, creates customer relationships, and increases loyalty (Nwokorie, 2016). Thus, research on the factors contributing to service recovery performance has gained popularity in the past two decades. For example, (Hewagama *et al.*, 2019) examined human resource management and empowerment on service recovery performance and job satisfaction among hotel employees and managers based on the data collected from 30 hotels in Sri Lanka.

Human Practices

Human practices are defined as the practices that influence individual behavior, attitude, and performance. Human practices can be subdivided into four: leadership, people management, knowledge management, and

creativity management. Human practices are part of an organization's activities concerning developing and managing its employees (Wall & Wood, 2005). In this competitive modern world, human practices are attracting a great deal of attention owing to their impact on the survival and success of organizations. In this context, the human factor plays a significant part in a business's operational and strategic activities with a view to improving and maintaining performance. Thus, researchers have looked into human practices and performance-related results in various countries and firms and found a positive association between human practices and performance (Aldoghan, 2021).

Digital Intensity

Despite the increasing interest in the antecedents of service recovery performance, previous research on the antecedents of service recovery performance has mainly focused on the traditional factors of organization management: human capital and social capital. In today's digital age, service firms that invest more in digital efforts will be able to develop the ability to sense changes in the market environment, seize new opportunities for innovation, and reconfigure new product offerings and value propositions (Rachinger, Rauter, Müller, Vorraber, & Schirgi, 2018). Even though the service industry has witnessed the trend and significance of digital, surprisingly, little research has examined the role of digital in-service recovery performance. Generally, digital intensity refers to the investment in technology-enabled initiatives to change how the company operates its customer engagements, internal operations, and even the business model (He, Huang, Choi, & Bilgihan, 2022). Previous research has also emphasized that increasing digital intensity can significantly benefit organizations through enhanced organizational performance and employee retention (He *et al.*, 2022).

Service Innovation

The hotel industry has faced many challenges, thus forcing hotel organizations to update and modify their services to meet the changes in customer needs and wants. With the increasing market competitiveness in terms of the quality and distinction of services and products, hotels must become more innovative in their services, procedures, and processes by developing delivery services to customers (Al-Ababneh, 2022). Innovation becomes an important technique in developing successful hotel organizations by developing and upgrading operations, offering new services, modifying existing services, and adding value to customers. Innovation in the hotel industry can also gain many benefits, such as competitive advantage, continuous improvement, and improved customer services (Tang, Wang, & Tang, 2015). Nieves and Diaz-Meneses (2018) found that hotels with high innovation can differentiate their services and products. As such, hotels use innovation by differentiating themselves, increasing their efficiency and competitive advantage, and introducing new technological solutions to improve their services (Al-Ababneh, 2022).

Methodology

Research Design

The current study is considered experimental since there is scarce research on this subject in Malaysia. Furthermore, since there is little or no preceding research to draw from, the current study is also deemed exploratory. Exploratory studies are conducted while the topic of interest is still being investigated in its early stages to gain knowledge and understanding for future in-depth inquiries. Accordingly, this study used a quantitative research paradigm and a structured questionnaire as its major data collection tool.

Population and Sample

The manager of three-star hotels in Malaysia was this study's target group. A total of 118 managers participated in the survey as respondents, which is greater than the minimum sample size required for this study as determined by G*power. Thus, the sample complies with the condition and suggestion of (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010).

Data Collection Process

The data collection process is contingent on three stages, the first involves selecting and contacting the hotels to obtain permission for data collection. In the second stage, the respondents were contacted, and questionnaires were distributed to them via email. Lastly, the final stage involves collecting data; the respondents were expected to email the completed questionnaires to the researcher, and the researcher would save them for screening at a later time in order to include only completed data for analysis and exclude incomplete data.

Findings and Discussions

Demographics

The study found that most respondents are males (71.20%, $n = 84$), while 28.80% ($n = 34$) are females. Most of the respondents were in the 24-34 age group (52.50%, $n = 62$), followed by 35-54 years old (39.80%, $n = 47$), while the 55-65-year-old respondents made up 5.10% ($n=6$) and the rest (2.5%, $n=3$) were 18-23 years old. The results also revealed that the respondents mostly have a bachelor's degree (45.80%, $n = 54$), followed by a diploma (33.10%, $n = 39$), master's (11%, $n = 13$), others (9.3%, $n = 11$), and Ph.D. (0.80%, $n = 1$).

Leadership

Based on the findings, most managers agreed with most of the items in this area, constituting mean scores between 3.59 and 3.98. This implies that the managers in Malaysia's hotel businesses have high perception levels with regard to leadership.

Table 1. Mean scores and standard deviation for leadership

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
L1	Senior executives share similar beliefs about the future direction of this hotel.	3.86	0.750
L2	Senior managers actively encourage change and implement a culture of improvement, learning, and innovation toward excellence.	3.95	0.738
L3	Employees have the opportunity to share and are encouraged to help the hotel implement changes.	3.98	0.679
L4	There is a high degree of unity of purpose in our hotel, and we have eliminated barriers between individuals and/or departments.	3.59	0.630

Knowledge Management

Most of the managers agreed with the bulk of the points in this area, which further indicates that they are happy with the hotel's knowledge management.

Table 2. Mean scores and standard deviation for knowledge management

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
KM1	The build-up of intellectual capital is important to our hotel management to gain a competitive advantage.	3.89	0.638
KM2	We always upgrade employees' knowledge and skill profiles.	3.89	0.749
KM3	Our hotel builds and maintains virtual and physical channels for sharing and disseminating information.	3.81	0.603
KM4	Our hotel manages its own special techniques.	3.69	0.713

People Management

Based on the findings, most managers agreed with most of the items in this area, constituting mean scores between 3.36 and 3.51 on the scale. This implies that the managers in Malaysia's hotel businesses also have high perception levels regarding people management.

Table 3. Mean scores and standard deviation for people management

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
PM1	We have an organization-wide training and development process, including career path planning, for all our employees.	3.36	0.718
PM2	Our hotel has maintained both top-down and bottom-up communication processes.	3.41	0.742
PM3	Employee satisfaction is formally and regularly measured.	3.40	0.718
PM4	Employee flexibility, multi-skilling, and training are actively used to support performance improvement.	3.49	0.835
PM5	We always maintain a work environment that contributes to the health, safety, and well-being of all employees.	3.51	0.884

Creativity Management

Most of the managers agreed with most of the points made in this area, thus indicating that they are happy with how the hotel manages its innovation.

Table 4. Mean scores and standard deviation for creativity management

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
CM1	We provide time and resources for employees to generate, share/exchange, and experiment with innovative ideas/solutions.	3.84	0.613
CM2	Employees work in diversely skilled work groups where there is free and open communication among group members.	3.93	0.556
CM3	In our hotel, employees frequently encounter non-routine and challenging work that stimulates creativity.	3.75	0.640
CM4	Employees are recognized and rewarded for their creativity and innovative ideas.	3.71	0.717

Digital Intensity

Most of the answers to the questions in this section constitute mean scores between 3.50 and 4.31. This means that most hotel managers gave digital intensity a very high rating. Additionally, this shows a favorable degree of digital intensity in the hotel business.

Table 5. Mean scores and standard deviation for digital intensity

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
DI1	We are using digital technologies (such as social media, analytics, mobile, and embedded devices) to understand our customers better.	3.97	0.750
DI2	We use digital channels (such as online, social media, and mobile) to market and distribute products and services.	4.28	0.639
DI3	We sell our products and services through digital channels.	4.31	0.660
DI4	We use digital channels to provide customer service.	3.96	0.744
DI5	Technology is allowing us to support customers and improve operational processes in new ways.	4.18	0.687
DI6	Our core processes are automated.	3.66	0.798
DI7	We have an integrated system to support key operational and customer information.	4.03	0.606
DI8	We use analytics to make better operational decisions.	3.86	0.657
DI9	We use digital technologies to increase the performance or added value of our existing products and services.	3.86	0.631
DI10	We have launched new business models based on digital technologies.	3.50	0.793

Service Innovation

The findings revealed that a respectable proportion of managers thought Putrajaya was an intriguing location. Some of them, however, objected vehemently that Putrajaya is an enticing location. Nonetheless, many agreed that Putrajaya is a cozy holiday spot.

Table 6. Mean scores and standard deviation for service innovation

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
SI1	Our hotel is always engaged in developing new services.	3.70	0.658
SI2	Our hotel often improves existing services or introduces new services.	3.87	0.661
SI3	Our hotel accelerates the introduction of new services.	3.69	0.620
SI4	Our hotel increases its overall commitment to developing new services.	3.73	0.649

Service Recovery Performance

Overall, the mean scores ranged from 3.77 to 4.25, and this result suggests a high level of agreement with service recovery performance in the Malaysian hotel industry.

Table 7. Mean scores and standard deviation for service recovery performance

Code	Item	Mean	Std. Deviation
SRP1	Employees do not mind dealing with complaining customers.	3.92	0.548
SRP2	No customers have left with unresolved problems.	3.88	0.669
SRP3	Satisfying complaining customers is a thrill to employees.	3.86	0.653
SRP4	Complaining customers that employees have dealt with in the past are among today's most loyal customers.	3.77	0.633
SRP5	Employees apologize to the customers for poor service.	4.25	0.656
SRP6	Overall, I am satisfied with the way the employees handle customer complaints.	4.09	0.728

Relationships Between Leadership, Knowledge Management, People Management, Creativity Management, Digital Intensity, and Service Recovery Performance

The derived R-squared value of 0.585 indicates that human practices (leadership, knowledge management, people management, and creativity management) and digital intensity can account for 58.5% of the variance in service recovery performance.

Table 8. Regression analysis between human practices, digital intensity, and service recovery performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	β	Std. Error	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	.591	.303		1.953	.053
Leadership	.302	.069	.350	4.385	.000
Knowledge management	-.097	.72	-.105	-1.351	.179
People management	.031	.044	.043	.691	.491
Creativity management	.420	.079	.402	5.292	.000
Digital intensity	.221	.077	.231	2.882	.005

a. Dependent variable: Service recovery performance

An inspection of individual predictors revealed that knowledge management ($\beta = .105$, $p > .010$) and people management ($\beta = .043$, $p > .010$) were not significant predictors of overall service recovery performance. Meanwhile, leadership ($\beta = .350$, $p < .050$), creativity management ($\beta = .402$, $p < .050$), and digital intensity ($\beta = .231$, $p < .050$) proved to serve as significant predictors of overall service recovery performance. Hence, Hypotheses 2 and 3 were not supported.

Relationships Between Leadership, Knowledge Management, People Management, Creativity Management, Digital Intensity, and Service Innovation

The R-squared value of 0.511 indicates that human practices (leadership, knowledge management, people management, and creative management) and digital intensity may account for 51.1% of the variance in service innovation.

Table 9. Regression analysis between human practices, digital intensity, and service innovation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	β	Std. Error	β	<i>t</i>	Sig.
(Constant)	.219	.387		-.566	.572
Leadership	.261	.088	.257	2.963	.004
Knowledge management	.021	.092	.019	.226	.822
People management	.095	.057	.114	1.677	.096
Creativity management	.345	.102	.280	3.394	.001
Digital intensity	.315	.098	.278	3.201	.002

a. Dependent variable: Service innovation

Multiple regression analyses examined whether human practices (leadership, knowledge management, people management, and creativity management) and digital intensity affect service innovation. An inspection of individual predictors revealed that knowledge management ($\beta = .019$, $p > .010$) and people management ($\beta = .114$, $p > .010$) were not significant predictors of overall service innovation, whereas leadership ($\beta = .257$, $p < .010$), creativity management ($\beta = .280$, $p < .010$), and digital intensity ($\beta = .278$, $p < .010$) proved to serve as significant predictors. Hence, Hypotheses 7 and 8 were not supported.

Relationship Between Service Innovation and Service Recovery Performance

The R-squared value of 0.392 suggests that 39.2% of the variation in service recovery performance can be explained by service innovation.

Table 10. Regression analysis between service innovation and service recovery performance

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	β	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.972	.233		8.475	.000
Service innovation	.531	.061	.626	8.654	.000

a. Dependent variable: Service recovery performance

Based on the above results, the association between service innovation and service recovery performance was significantly correlated, as shown by the value of .626 and $p < .010$ in Table 10; therefore, Hypothesis 6 was supported in this study.

Mediating Effect of Service Innovation on the Relationship Between Leadership, Knowledge Management, People Management, Creativity Management, Digital Intensity, and Service Recovery Performance

Only 39.2 percent of the variation in service recovery performance can be explained by human practices, including leadership, knowledge management, people management, and creativity management, as well as the digital intensity and service innovation, according to the R-squared after adding the mediating factor—service innovation—which was calculated to be 0.392.

Table 11. Regression analysis for the mediating factor

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	β	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	.626	.298		2.100	.038
Direct	.531	.061	.626	8.654	.000
Indirect	.158	.073	.187	2.183	.031

a. Dependent variable: Service recovery performance

The relationship between the independent variables and the mediating variable and the relationship between the mediating variable and the dependent variable was affected directly. An indirect effect, on the other hand, denotes a mediational impact in which an independent variable influences a dependent variable via a mediating variable. The research used the four-step procedure devised by Baron and Kenny (1986), which allows for the execution of multiple regression analyses and the examination of the significance of the coefficients at each stage. Simple regression analysis was also used as the initial stage to determine the relationships between leadership, knowledge management, people management, and creativity management with the performance of the service recovery process.

Implication of the Study

The current study provides a theoretical mechanism linking human practices and service recovery performance via service innovation. Overall, the results showed that human practices were positively related to service innovation, and this finding advances the literature on service innovation because research has evidenced that different human practices influence service innovation and the recovery performance of firms. These results are also consistent with research in which human practices were found to engender positive service performance

(Aldoghan, 2021; Tajeddini, Martin, & Altinay, 2020). Next, the results have addressed the gap in examining how digital intensity influences the service innovation-performance relationship using a sample of managers at three-star hotels. Specifically, the current study examined the mediating effect of service innovation on the relationship between digital intensity and service recovery performance, where the results showed that service innovation indeed mediated the relationship between digital intensity and service recovery performance.

In essence, the current study provides practical implications for the hospitality industry. There are two implications for how organizations can positively affect service recovery performance. First, since human practices and digital intensity may influence service recovery management performance, organizations should focus on training managers to engage in human practices (leadership, people management, knowledge management, and creativity management) and digitalization. Second, the results showed that service innovation positively affected service recovery performance; hence, this finding supports the assertion of existing literature that service recovery performance can be promoted through innovation in the organization. Therefore, encouraging innovation in service firms can help increase the quality-of-service recovery performance and ultimately promote successful service recovery.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The relationships between the independent variables and the mediating variable and the mediating variable and the dependent variable were affected directly. An indirect effect, on the other hand, is a mediational impact in which an independent variable influences a dependent variable via a mediating variable. The current study used the four-step procedure devised by Baron and Kenny (1986), which allows for the execution of multiple regression analyses and the examination of the significance of the coefficients at each stage. Additionally, simple regression analysis was used as the initial stage to determine the relationships between digital intensity, leadership, knowledge management, people management, and creativity management with the performance of the service recovery process.

Considerable connections between leadership, people management, creative management, digital intensity, and service innovation have also been discovered in this study, while the relationship between knowledge management and service innovation was negative. The results also demonstrated a significant relationship between service innovation and service recovery performance. This finding is supported by (Al-Ababneh, Masadeh, Al-Sabi, & Al-Badarneh, 2021), who claimed that service recovery performance would be more successful if service innovation were more positive. Based on these results, the researcher may conclude that leadership, creativity management, people management, digital intensity, and service recovery performance were all mediated by service innovation. Overall, six of the ten primary assumptions of this study have been verified. Since knowledge management and people management were shown to be insignificant predictors of total service recovery performance, Hypotheses 2, 3, 7, and 8 were, therefore, not supported.

This study has several limitations. First, since the sample only involves managers, employees, or frontline employees should also be considered in future studies. Second, it would be useful for future research to extend the current findings by examining other factors that can also influence service recovery performance via the mediating effect of service innovation for a better understanding of its functions. Lastly, since the current study is limited to three-star hotels in Malaysia, future studies may include other large-scale star-rated hotels in the country to allow for a more extensive scope that covers more possible representations of the operating hotels.

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