Asian Tourists' Post-COVID Perceptions of Service Quality at Shopping Centers in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

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Abstract - This research aims to investigate the factors that significantly affect Asian tourists' shopping behavior and to analyze the perceived service quality gap. The data were collected at Chiang Mai shopping centers from Asian tourists who voluntarily consented to volunteer. A questionnaire is used to follow the concept of SERVQUAL with 400 sample size and analyzes by using the gap analysis. The results show that the relationship between the expected and perceived service levels is the five service quality dimensions, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, and the tangible aspects of a service have the strongest effect on the customers' perception of the service level. Asian customers are sensitive to the quality of service.

Index Terms - Asian Tourists, Service Quality, Shopping Centers, Gap Analysis

I. INTRODUCTION (HEADING 1)

Thailand is a popular destination for international tourists, especially those from Asian countries [1]. The tourism market in Thailand has been steadily growing, increasing consumption capacity and revenue from Asian tourists [2]. In the first quarter of 2013, the number of Asian tourists increased by 93 percent, with Chinese tourists being the largest group, due in part to the popularity of the Chinese film Lost in Thailand, filmed in the northern province of Chiangmai. This surge in tourism has also brought great business opportunities to the tourist shopping industry. Enterprises in this industry focus on perceived service quality, customer satisfaction, and analyzing potential demand and future trends to formulate and implement effective marketing strategies to stay competitive. Chiang Mai is the top tourist destination in Thailand [3]. It has not only a multicultural destination but also shopping centers in the areas of retail, services, and products, which make Chiang Mai fantastic for Asian tourists. Travel Economic activities mainly include eating, lodging, transportation, shopping, and entertainment. Shopping is an important activity in the travel economy [4]. Although, the Chiang Mai shopping center was affected by Covid-19. The sales revenues have decreased. To attract Asian tourists, the shopping center has renovated its service quality and tried to improve itself. It has implemented advanced technology systems for pre-ordering, inventory management, and advertising through modern electronic media.

This study assumes that Asian customers are satisfied with the service quality of shopping centers. Recommendations for developing a sustainable business model for shopping centers in Chiang Mai can be applied to other regions.

Objectives

1. To investigate the factors that significantly affect Asian tourists' shopping behavior

2. To analyze the service quality gap perceived by them.

II. LITERATURE SURVEY

1. Service Quality

According to researchers and practitioners, providing quality service is essential for customer satisfaction and loyalty in customer-centric industries [5]. Service quality can be defined differently, but it is typically measured by comparing the customer's expectations with their perception of how the service provider delivers the service. This perception is often called perceived quality management [6].

Improving customer awareness and satisfaction with a product depends heavily on the customer service provided by the company [7]. Customer service is influenced by consumer behavior and multi-item measures to marketing stimuli such as price, quality of service, product quality, and other related functions that meet customer needs [8]. The success of a firm's future operation depends on the

crucial role of customer service. Therefore, a company that invests in improving its customer service should prioritize having a customer-centered belief.

Service quality has been a significant research topic in marketing literature for several decades. This is due to its apparent relationship with customer satisfaction, customer retention, sales revenue, and market share. However, despite service quality being based on a multidimensional structure, there is no general agreement on the nature or content of these dimensions. This is mainly because of service quality's intangible, heterogeneous, and inseparable nature. Customer satisfaction is a significant loyalty positive [8].

Over the past two decades, researchers have developed multiple conceptual models to explain the internal structure of service quality and measure consumers' perceptions in various industries [9, 10,11]. Persuaded by all the above illustrations, the researcher realized that customer service quality is the key content in every organization, especially in the service field.

2. The dimensions of service quality

Customer satisfaction is impacted by the services customers anticipate and receive during the service process [8]. Customers tend to be more satisfied when they perceive a higher quality of service, which results in repeat purchases. However, it can be challenging for a business to measure the quality of services perceived by its customers and identify the factors that influence service quality. To measure perceived service quality, the SERVQUAL scale is a widely used multi-item instrument that consists of universal statements [11] as shown in Figure 1.
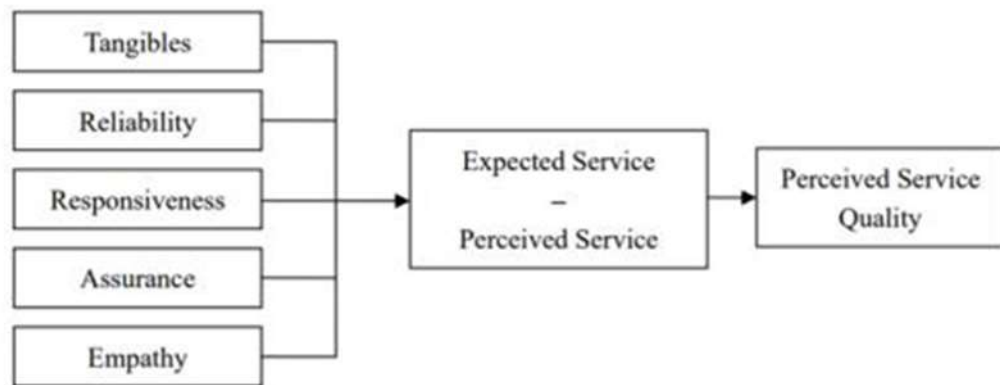

Fig. 1 SERVQUAL Model Dimensions

The SERVQUAL scale is a tool used to measure a customer's expectations and perceived service quality before and after receiving a particular service. The scale comprises five dimensions, ranked based on their relative importance, according to Tamanna T. [12] research. The first dimension is reliability, which refers to consistency in performance. The second dimension is assurance, which measures the firm's employees' knowledge, courtesy, and ability to gain customers' trust. The third dimension is tangibility, which refers to the physical evidence of the service provided by the firm. The fourth dimension is responsiveness, which measures the employee's readiness to provide services to customers promptly. The final dimension is empathy, which deals with the employee's individualized attention to customers.

The SERVQUAL scale measures the difference between a customer's expectations and the actual service they receive in a service encounter [13]. The customer's perception scores are subtracted from their expectations to calculate the service quality score [14]. A high, positive service quality score indicates the service provision is high quality. Conversely, a negative service quality score in a particular dimension indicates that the firm must improve its service activities.

3. The Gap Model

Hung, W.-H., and Hsu, Y.-T. [15] introduced the variables of the technology sharing experiential marketing (TSE) framework, which is more compatible with service quality and service gap. This model aims to help retailers bridge the gap between their services and customers' expectations. The model identifies potential obstacles hindering retailers from satisfying customers [16]. If customers' expectations exceed their perceived service, they may feel dissatisfied and develop a negative perception of the retailer's services. To improve service quality, retailers need to eliminate the negative perception caused by the service gap, which is the difference between what customers expect and what is provided. There are five potential gaps that retailers must understand and address to improve their service quality [17] as shown in Figure 2.
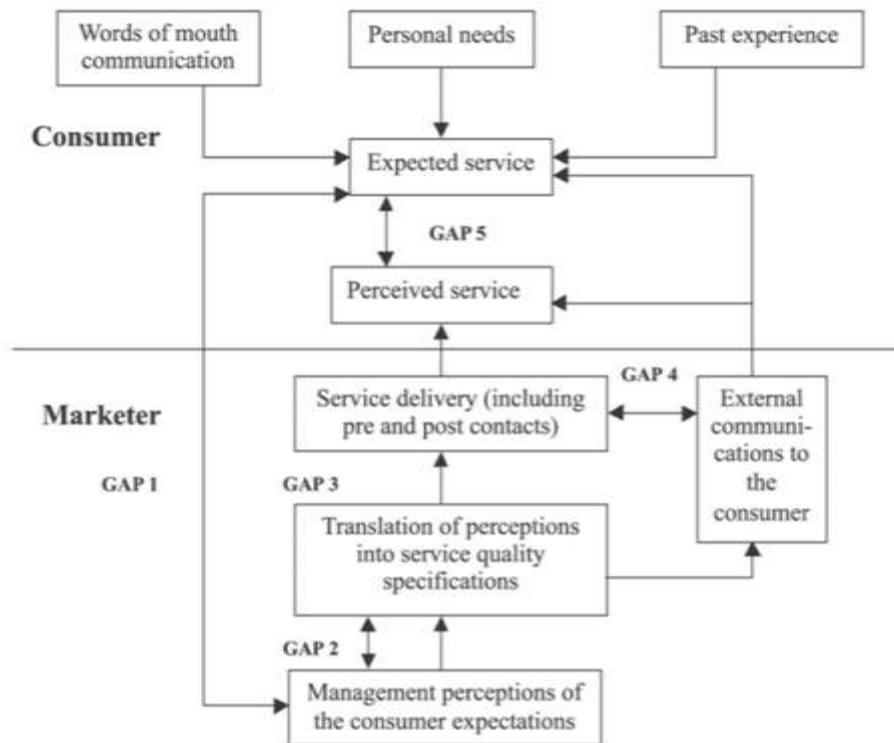
Fig. 2 The SERVQUAL Gap Model

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Measuring customer satisfaction has become increasingly important in many industries. Industry practitioners often use tools such as the SERVQUAL scale to assess service quality due to its high reliability. This scale comprises five dimensions to measure the perception of service quality among Asian tourists at Chiang Mai shopping center. The SERVQUAL scale is based on the idea that service quality is the difference between a consumer's perceived performance and expectations. It provides valuable insights and helps to identify which service aspects contribute to a positive customer experience.

When measuring the quality of a service, it is important to consider all aspects of the service process, both tangible and intangible. This includes the specific context of the service, from the initial interaction with the customer to the final post-service experience. The complete service process should be considered, encompassing all stages of the customer's experience. Additionally, if technology is involved in the service, its impact on the customer's experience should also be measured.

Sampling Design and Data Collection

The research was conducted using non-probability sampling, with the target population being Asian tourists who shop in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The data was collected through a questionnaire survey conducted on-site. The primary data was collected using questionnaires, and the sample size was calculated to be around 386 customers using a formula [18]. The author chose the survey method with the questionnaire to collect the primary data from approximately 400 Asian tourists who shop at shopping malls in Chiang Mai.

Data analysis

After collecting the required data, the researcher analyzed it using various statistical methods. These methods included descriptive statistics to determine the frequency of responses, reliability analysis to test the instrument's internal consistency, and correlation analysis to assess the influence of independent variables (service quality dimensions) or dependent variables (customer satisfaction). The researcher coded and entered the data into a computer for statistical analysis.

Reliability test analysis

Ensuring a survey scale is well-constructed is crucial in research. Reliability test analysis, or basic statistical analysis, helps to determine this. The internal consistency of the scale is assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha. A value above 0.7 is considered acceptable for the survey [19]. The operational variables in this study have coefficients ranging from 0.729 to 0.924. This indicates that each variable has a high level of internal consistency.

IV. RESULTS

A research study surveyed 400 Asian tourists, mostly males. The survey found that 53.7% of the surveyed group were male, while 46.3% were female. Most of the tourists (42.1%) were between 31 and 40 years old, and 29.2% of the surveyed group were enterprise workers. About 43.5% of the tourists were from China, and they stayed in Chiang Mai for an average of one week, with 9% staying longer.

Table 1 presents the data that shows a significant impact on the perceived service level. The satisfaction rating of Asian shoppers is 3.36, with a standard deviation of 0.82, indicating an overall satisfaction level among Asian customers. However, it is important to note that this satisfaction level is only partial and not extremely high among the general population.

Table 1 Customer expectations and the perception gap between the level of service quality

Factor names		Expectation		Perception		Service quality (Gap)			
		Mean	Std	Mean	Std	Mean	Std	T-value	Sig.
Tangibility	Q9	3.55	0.095	3.87	0.927	0.32	0.972	-2.58	0.011
	Q10	4.38	0.877	3.61	0.185	-0.77	0.141	-5.7	0.0000
	Q11	4.32	0.828	4.01	0.983	-0.31	0.458	-2.99	0.003
Assurance	Q11	4.30	0.101	3.64	0.27	-0.66	0.948	-4.08	0.0000
	Q12	4.74	0.508	3.78	0.253	-0.96	0.351	-7.36	0.0000
	Q13	4.52	0.696	3.64	0.27	-0.88	0.948	-4.08	0.0000
Responsiveness	Q14	4.54	0.73	3.83	0.27	-0.71	0.948	-4.08	0.0000
	Q15	4.14	0.977	3.77	0.96	-0.37	0.454	-2.74	0.007
	Q16	4.59	0.613	3.67	0.246	-0.92	0.381	-7.3	0.0000
Reliability	Q17	3.82	0.18	3.66	0.452	-0.16	0.689	-1.07	0.284
	Q18	4.06	0.093	3.64	0.216	-0.42	0.711	-2.7	0.008
	Q19	4.5	0.672	3.67	0.17	-0.83	0.352	-6.72	0.0000
Empathy	Q20	4.46	0.093	3.64	0.216	-0.82	0.711	-2.7	0.008
	Q21	4.43	0.784	3.49	0.232	-0.94	0.545	-6.7	0.0000
	Q22	4.09	0.098	3.71	0.191	-0.38	0.713	-2.44	0.0160
	Q23	4.29	0.823	3.69	0.124	-0.6	0.469	-4.51	0.0000
Customer satisfaction		Mean value:3.36				Standard Deviation:0.82			

This study utilized factor analysis to break down customer experience service quality into sub-factors. A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to test for causal relationships among variables, and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Regression analysis on expectation affects perception.

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.414	0.644		6.868	0.0000
Expected service quality	1.207	0.143	0.612	4.485	0
R=0.496	R² =0.246		Adj-R²=0.017	F =4.174	0.0000

After examining the data in Table 2, we found that the R² value is 0.246. This indicates that there is a 24.6% correlation between the shopping mall's perceived service level and how customers interpret the service level. The F value is 4.174, and the F value test reveals a significance level of 0.000<0.05. This suggests that there is a good regression effect and a significant level. The expected service level is part of the regression equation and has a standard regression coefficient of 0.612. The significant probability of the t-value test is less than 0.1, which means there is a good effect.

To better understand the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction, we used symbols to represent different variables. E represents the expected service level, P represents the perceived service level, SQ represents the service quality, and CS represents customer satisfaction. The typical regression equation for the expected service level to the perceived service level can be written as follows:

$p = 0.612 \times E$

Table 3 shows the results of a regression analysis that explored the extent to which the perceived service level of Asian customers could be explained by the expected service quality level measured dimensions, namely tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and care. These dimensions were used as independent variables, while Asian customer satisfaction was used as the dependent variable.

Table 3 Regression analysis on the dimensions of service expectation affects service perception.

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.072	1.463		6.275	0.0000
Expected service for tangible	0.222	0.128	0.317	6.593	0.042
Expected service for reliability	0.132	0.146	0.131	5.431	0.017
Expected service for responsiveness	0.207	0.008	0.191	7.112	0.026
Expected service for assurance	0.23	0.143	0.162	8.452	0.0110
Expected service for empathy	0.267	0.0095	0.158	2.332	0.031
R=0.447	R² =0.200		Adj-R²=0.371	F =6.331	P=0.013

Based on the analysis of the table, the results indicate that the regression equation is significant. The F value of the regression analysis is 6.331, and the significance of the F value test is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This means that the expected service level significantly impacts the perceived service level. The t-test values of "tangibles expectations", "reliability expectations", "responsiveness expectations", "assurance expectations", and "empathy expectations" are less than 0.05, indicating that these five aspects have a significant impact on the perceived service level. The variables "tangibles expectations", "reliability expectations", "responsiveness expectations", "guarantee of expectation", and "empathy expectations" explain the variables in the equation. The five assurance expectation service variables explain 20% of the perception level of the service rate.

The expected service level can explain the perceived service level. It is important to consider the expected service level to achieve positive value and results. By comparing the standard regression coefficient, we can determine the influence of each variable on the perceived service level. The ranking of the five aspects of the expected service level, according to their influence on perception, is as follows: tangibility, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and reliability.

The researcher utilized five service quality dimensions, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility, to establish a relationship between the expected and perceived service levels. ER1, ER2, EA, EE, and ET represent the reliability, reactivity, assurance, empathy, and tangibility expectations, respectively. The standard regression equation for the study is:

$$p = 0.317 \times ER + 0.191 \times ER2 + 0.162 \times EA + 0.158 \times EE + 0.131 \times ER1$$

Regression analysis shows that the tangible aspects of a service have the strongest effect on the customers' perception of the service level. In comparison, the responsiveness of the service has minimal impact on the perception of Asian customers. Furthermore, it has been observed that the level of service expected by customers and its various measurement dimensions have a significant positive influence on the perceived service level.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

1) Factor analysis of service quality

Swart, M. P. [20] put forward the five service quality dimensions widely circulated in academia. In this paper, the characteristics of the customer service perception into multi-item service quality measurement based on the customer service perception characteristics design of service quality measurement scale eventually formed 16 measuring items. SPSS was used to conduct factor analysis on the data of question indexes. After factor analysis and rotation, five factors with clear meanings were obtained and named "tangibility", "reliability", "assurance", "empathy," and "responsiveness," respectively.

Therefore, this paper names each factor with the same vocabulary. This shows that the service quality SERVQUAL scale is suitable for service quality evaluation of customer service perception. Through factor analysis, the cumulative variance contribution percentage of the five dimensions reached 69.366 %, and the Cronbach's coefficient was all greater than 0.736, indicating that the five dimensions had high credibility.

2) Difference analysis between perceived service level and expected service level

According to this paper, there is a significant difference between the perception of customer service quality and their expectations. All 16 measuring items related to the customer's perception of service quality levels were below 4.01. Except for item number nine, which stated that the sellers and staff at shopping centers had attractive appearances and facades, other multi-item averages about the perception of service quality level were lower than the average value of service quality expectation level [21]. The average service quality value was negative, indicating a gap between the customer service quality and their expectations. This paper also found that there is a positive correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction.

Therefore, the Chiang Mai shopping centers must start with five projects and take practical action to improve service quality and customer satisfaction.

3)The influence of service quality on Asian customers' satisfaction

The study discovered that customers' perception of "tangibility", "reliability", "reactivity", "assurance," and "empathy" was lower than their expectations. However, there was still a significant positive impact on customer satisfaction. This contradicts the information presented in the literature [22, 23, 24]. According to the concept of service quality, if the perceived service level matches the expected level, the quality is considered ordinary. If the perceived level is higher than expected, the service quality is high, while the opposite means low quality. Despite the customers' perception being lower than expected, the regression analysis still showed a positive correlation between customer satisfaction and service quality.

VI. RECOMMENDATION

The questionnaire survey reveals that there are gaps between the expectations of customers and the quality of service provided. These gaps exist in the service qualities that impact the customer experience. Understanding the service quality in the transmission process can shorten these gaps, resulting in improved service quality for Asian tourist shoppers. The statistical results highlight these gaps and offer insights into their generation and improvement. This section, combined with the SERVQUAL Gap Model, suggests ways retail enterprises can improve their service quality for reference.

Gap1: Customers' expectations versus management perceptions: due to the lack of marketing research, inadequate upward communication, and too many layers of management.

Customers who purchase multiple items have high expectations when it comes to service quality. They are always looking for ways to improve in this area. Additionally, since services are intangible, customers cannot always know exactly what to expect before making a purchase. However, after purchasing a service, the quality should be reflected in tangible ways such as through product quality and results.

To ensure high-quality service and set reasonable expectations for customers, shopping centers should follow a few steps. First, it's important to establish clear and specific service quality standards that reflect the needs of customers. This will help create a tangible and consistent experience for all customers. Second, shopping center staff should communicate effectively with customers before providing service. This includes providing relevant information about the service and guiding customers to use the service correctly to avoid any issues. Additionally, staff should communicate any practical difficulties that may affect the service, such as technology or service issues that haven't yet met customer expectations. This will help customers form reasonable expectations and avoid making unrealistic demands.

To provide personalized service, the entire shopping service process should be taken into account, including pre-service, in-service, and post-service. Before providing service to different groups of customers, valuable advice and suggestions should be provided. After customers receive service, the shopping center should keep in touch with them through text messages, phone calls, and return visits to gather feedback on their experience. This will help the shopping center assess the business-perceived quality and make necessary improvements.

Gap 2: Management perceptions versus service specifications: a perception due to inadequate commitment to service quality.

The shopping center places great importance on the process of service design and provision management, which serves as the core of its service quality management. This process encompasses two critical aspects. Firstly, service specifications must be explicit. While designing services for foreign customers, it is important to remember that most customers are not familiar with the individual services offered. Many customers are looking for consulting services related to the application process. Although these services may involve trivial handling processes and complex operational steps, they should be designed to cater to the different needs of customers and provide special care for them. Therefore, the Chiang Mai shopping center must create different service packages to meet the needs of its customers.

Secondly, the top leaders of the shopping center must effectively supervise the service quality norms. To ensure quality management of the service provision process, it is essential to strictly follow the prescribed service provision specifications and supervise adherence to the service specifications. In case of any deviation, the management personnel must promptly correct their behaviors and evaluate the service provision process and results.

Furthermore, when collecting customer evaluations and conducting customer satisfaction surveys, it is crucial to have a dedicated person to guide the customers in filling out the surveys to ensure that the evaluation of service quality is genuine and effective.

Gap 3: Service specifications versus service delivery: because of role ambiguity and Conflicts, poor job fits, inappropriate controls, lack of control, and lack of teamwork can hinder job performance.

The retail industry's overall service delivery depends not only on the front-line staff who interact with customers directly but also on the cooperation between different service departments. This includes the collaboration between service staff and managers, information desk service staff, service hotline staff, and other departments. Such cooperation is crucial in ensuring a seamless service delivery process. Especially important are the sellers who interact with customers directly. During customers' business and consultation (especially after-sale queries), effective negotiation and communication between different departments should be in place to solve problems quickly and ensure the enterprise's higher overall operation and provide reliable service.

Problems in the staff and service delivery process may arise when the staff is unable to adapt to the work requirements. Different service staff may have varying degrees of willingness to provide customers with satisfactory service. Even for the same service staff, this willingness may vary greatly occasionally. Front-line service staff in the retail industry often do repetitive service work for a long time, which may limit their full potential and reduce their motivation to complete service work well.

To ensure that the minimum level of service quality is achieved, service personnel must strive to provide the best service level possible, with management staff taking effective measures to improve staff work enthusiasm. Such measures may include job rotation, assigning service personnel to positions that are suitable for them, and ensuring that they provide the best customer service.

Gap 4: Service delivery versus external communication: because of inadequate horizontal communications to over-promise.

In order to effectively promote the enterprise, the shopping mall must collaborate with other relevant departments to provide coordinated external services. For instance, collaborating with the information department will enable customers to conduct business through multiple channels and access consulting information to improve service procedures. Working with the business department will help encourage business development and prevent working alone. In addition, collaborating with the logistics department will ensure logistics supply for business development. By cooperating with the publicity department, marketing managers and designers can communicate

regularly to ensure that neither party makes commitments that cannot be achieved and that designers can meet the needs of network marketing activities. This will also involve planning and preparing technical resources to meet those needs. Finally, it is crucial to consolidate cooperation with peers, learn from their experiences, and leverage their strengths to enhance competitiveness and avoid weaknesses.

Gap 5: The difference between what customers expect from a product or service and what they receive perceptions because of the influences from the customer need and the gaps on When you use a service provider, your expectations are influenced by your personal needs. word-of-mouth recommendations, and past service experiences.

Customer service quality is crucial for retail enterprises. Customers are sensitive to the quality of service they receive, especially during critical moments of interaction with service personnel. Improving service quality enhances the interaction and helps the enterprise impact customer perceptions of service process contact. This includes helping customers understand the function of goods in the purchase process, assisting with payment, and offering opportunities to experience new products and services. These measures can prevent service failure. However, service failure may still occur despite a perfect service delivery system. In such cases, service remedy is crucial to winning back customer satisfaction. The nature of service recovery measures varies greatly among enterprises. For retail enterprises, applying two types of compensation at the psychological and substantive levels is suggested. Specifically, the enterprise should explain the reasons for service failure through apology, quick response, and sympathy. At the same time, symbolic or monetary compensation, free service re-provision, refund, and other effective remedies should be carried out. The success of the service recovery depends on the combination of these remedies in terms of time and responsiveness.

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