

How to make negative services less unpleasant for consumers

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Service quality beliefs are usually positively related to customer satisfaction - the higher the perceived service quality, the higher the customer's satisfaction. However, an article published in the August issue of the *Journal of Service Research* finds this relationship may be more complicated in "negative service environments" (i.e., services that consumers would prefer not to have to use), such as health screening, diagnostic tests, or even auto repair.

The authors of the paper studied the relationship between [stress](#) and accuracy beliefs in the context of mammography, one such "negative" [service](#). They found that women coming in for a routine screening test felt more stress as their belief in the efficacy of mammography increased. Meanwhile, those coming in for a diagnostic test felt less stress as their belief in the efficacy of mammography increased.

These findings suggest healthcare providers in hospitals should consider a patient's stage in the testing process to determine how to best manage the patient's experience and reduce stress levels. The article suggests separating routine screening patients from diagnostic screening patients, so doctors and nurses can better tailor communication to these different patient groups.

For routine screening patients, service providers should help reduce stress for patients by playing soothing music or providing distracting magazines in the waiting room. For diagnostic screening patients, service providers should focus on reducing patients' uncertainty by having

information on the testing process, the latest advances in preventive care, or the kinds of treatment to which it leads available in the waiting room.

More information: The article "Understanding Emotional Reactions for Negative Services: The Impact of Efficacy Beliefs and Stage in Process" by Elizabeth Gelfand Miller, Mary Frances Luce, Barbara E. Kahn and Emily F. Conant is available free of charge for a limited time at jsr.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/12/1/87 .

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