

# Listen, respond, say sorry: Food delivery customers reveal how to make it right after failures in service

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Professor Babak Taheri. Credit: Nottingham Trent University

Food delivery services should give customers a voice, respond quickly to complaints and proactively apologize when things go wrong, according

to a new study which explores what companies can do to rebuild trust after failures.

Researchers at Nottingham Business School, part of Nottingham Trent University, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh Napier University, University of Wolverhampton and The University of Central Florida surveyed 925 people on their experiences with Iran's largest online food ordering platform—a service similar to those such as Uber Eats and Deliveroo—which receives more than two million online visits each month.

The survey was followed up by 45 in-depth interviews to better understand how people experience and recover from services failures during food ordering and delivery.

The survey revealed that an apology, an offer of compensation, and giving customers a voice to air their grievance all helped to rebuild trust through forgiveness.

However, responses also suggested that customers who were more familiar with company failures were more likely to respond negatively to apologies and offers of compensation, feeling their voice wouldn't be heard. Here, when an incident has become [public knowledge](#) and awareness amongst consumers is high, firms should quickly and proactively accept responsibility and provide automatic compensation as these may be inevitable; positioning their response in a manner likely to provide the best chance of recovery and retention.

Anger and frustration were found to be key themes in the interviews. However, these emotions were not related to the service failure itself, but instead to factors such as the response provided by the company, a perceived ineffectiveness in handling complaints, and not giving customers a chance to be heard.

Participants were also frustrated by generic complaint-handling processes, instead desiring a personal response from the company. This exacerbated [negative emotions](#) and increased the likelihood of the customer not using the service again.

Babak Taheri, Professor of Marketing at Nottingham Business School's Marketing and Consumer Studies Research Center, said, "A positive reputation and [customer](#) retention is vital for food delivery services which need to attract food vendors to partner with them.

"While we focused on one company for this study, all food delivery services can learn from the comments we received. The importance of having a service recovery strategy cannot be underestimated when it comes to rebuilding trust among customers, particularly those who order frequently and have already experienced a company's response to failure.

"We see that customers are often not discouraged from using a service due to the failure itself, but the way it is handled. Food service delivery companies should take note of the need for a quick, clear, and personalized complaints process which is open to feedback and ensures repeat custom.

"We also found that awareness had an impact, so if [food](#) service failures receive [media coverage](#) or are discussed on [social media](#), consumers are more likely to voice their concerns and seek compensation. When an incident has become public knowledge and awareness amongst consumers is high, firms should quickly and proactively accept responsibility and provide automatic compensation; positioning their response in a manner likely to provide the best chance of recovery and retention.

"They must provide these more proactive problem-solving methods in order to restore relationships with consumers through openness and

honesty before their customers become increasingly aware, knowledgeable, and initiate their own service recovery efforts."

The paper "Investigating the Effects of Service Recovery Strategies on Consumer Forgiveness and Post-Trust in the Food Delivery Sector" has been published in the *International Journal of Hospitality Management*.

**More information:** Martin Gannon et al, Investigating the effects of service recovery strategies on consumer forgiveness and post-trust in the food delivery sector, *International Journal of Hospitality Management* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103341](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2022.103341)

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