Emotional Mirroring and Service Recovery: Managerial and Financial Insights from Airlines in Kurdistan

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ABSTRACT:

This study investigates how emotional mirroring—the ability of service providers to reflect and respond empathetically to customers' emotions—affects service recovery performance within the airline industry in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The research explores both managerial and financial implications, providing insights into how emotional attunement can strengthen recovery efforts after service failures. Using a quantitative approach with survey data from employees and managers of regional airlines, the study employs regression analysis to test the relationships among emotional mirroring, customer satisfaction, and recovery effectiveness. The results indicate that emotional mirroring significantly enhances service recovery outcomes and explains a substantial portion of the variance in customer satisfaction levels. Furthermore, the study identifies the managerial importance of integrating emotional intelligence training into employee development programs. Findings highlight that emotional mirroring is not only a psychological skill but also a strategic tool that supports organizational reputation and profitability. The study contributes to both theory and practice by emphasizing the critical role of emotional responsiveness in improving customer trust and post-failure loyalty.

Keywords: Emotional mirroring; Service recovery; Airlines; Financial Implications; Kurdistan Region of Iraq.
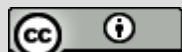
1 INTRODUCTION

In the world of sustainable businesses, effective service recovery management has become a strategic priority for customer-centric organizations, especially in sectors that rely heavily on human interaction, such as commercial aviation and other high-value service industries with significant financial stakes [1]. While service disruptions are unavoidable in some operational situations, they can directly impact consumer trust, operational efficiency, and overall financial performance through reputation loss and reduced customer retention. However, recent studies have shown that well-executed service recovery, without mitigating the negative effects of any errors, can improve the customer experience and protect long-term revenue streams [2]. A contact list plays a vital role in this process, because service recovery strategies are applied, and customer feedback is addressed in time, which allows keeping both customer loyalty and cost-effective recovery operations.

In this regard, scholars have tended to concentrate on economic and organizational aspects of service delivery. Emotional mirroring, which refers to the capacity of an employee to recognize, interpret, and regulate his or her own emotions when dealing with customers, has been found to be a decisive element of the quality of the user experience and the financial performance of service recovery [3]. In contrast to other mechanisms that only pay attention to technical skills and standardized procedures, this emotional mirroring construct highlights the role of interpersonal skills in the development of empathic and personalized responses, which are vital in effective service recovery and can reduce customer churn [4][5]. Nevertheless, the theoretical and empirical gaps exist in terms of the direct effect of these emotional competencies on the post-recovery outcomes, such as customer lifetime value and organizational profitability, following a service failure.

The aviation sector, particularly in developing regions or in sociopolitical contexts such as Iraqi Kurdistan, offers an ideal scenario for analyzing this dynamic. Airlines operating in diverse regions face multiple failures, logistical constraints that impose high customer expectations, and frequent and critical periods of failure and recovery [6]. Furthermore, the increasing efficiency and globalization of aviation services require local firms to adopt more customer-centric practices, integrating emotional intelligence into service processes as a way to strengthen both customer relationships and competitive advantage, while personal hiring skills may vary significantly [7]. At the same time, the literature on services in this context is being reclaimed, which lacks consistency and coherence, particularly in connecting emotional management to quantifiable financial outcomes.

Given the importance of the topic, this study relied on a sample of airlines in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It used a quantitative approach, including a pre-tested questionnaire, to collect data. The aim was to uncover the role of emotional mirroring by service providers as an approach to enhancing service recovery in ways that not only improve customer perceptions but also safeguard revenue stability and brand equity. Accordingly, this study seeks to fill this gap by incorporating an emotional approach that links psychological and behavioral dimensions to service quality from an innovative contextual perspective: airlines operating in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, a culturally complex environment rarely studied in the international literature. This paper is an empirical study of the effect of emotional mirroring on responses after a service disruption using a quantitative design with validated employee surveys in the aviation industry. The uniqueness of this research is that it is both theoretical and practical and it unravels the underlying dimensions that can either improve or constrain the success of service recovery, providing a new and culturally sensitive insight to the modern research on organizational behavior, emotional management, customer loyalty, and sustainability in service provision.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The management of customer experiences in a service environment where there is high interaction between the employees and the customers is a major strategic issue when faced with service disruptions. Service recovery, which is the collection of actions an organization undertakes to resolve a disruption, is identified as a major contributor to customer satisfaction, loyalty, long-term retention, and corporate reputation with direct correlations to revenue protection and brand equity [53]. Research on service recovery has long been concentrated on the tangible and structural dimensions, including financial compensation, responsiveness, or the sense of equity; nevertheless, recent studies have been developed that emphasize the importance of emotional competencies of contact employees as a valuable variable in situations of high emotional sensitivity and high financial impact [8].

In this context, the emotional mirroring of service providers, which is the capacity to recognize, comprehend, cope, and control their emotions in stressful or conflict situations with a customer, is considered one of the most important but understudied variables of the service recovery process [9]. This competency not only fosters a more empathetic and adaptive employee response, but it can also significantly alter a customer's perception of the quality of service provided following a negative incident, thereby influencing their willingness to continue doing business and their likelihood to recommend the service [10]. Despite its potential, emotional mirroring has rarely been formally incorporated into theoretical models of service quality and organizational behavior, especially models that connect emotional competencies to measurable financial outcomes such as reduced churn and increased share-of-wallet, indicating an important conceptual and empirical gap that this study aims to address.

Therefore, this study seeks to analyze how service employees' emotional mirroring constitutes a critical mechanism for improving the effectiveness of service recovery in highly personal contexts while also considering its potential to optimize operational costs and protect revenue streams. To achieve this end, the following Main Hypothesis (MH) is formulated:

MH. Emotional mirroring has a significant role in enhancing service recovery in airlines under study, leading to stronger customer loyalty and better financial outcomes.

Using an experimental approach, the study not only seeks to highlight the importance of this psychological dimension in real-world organizational settings but also provides a practical framework for developing emotional competencies in customer service. Thus, this study contributes to the literature on managing emotions at work and offers valuable guidance for training, assessing, and developing social and emotional skills in customer service-focused organizations where customer experience is directly tied to competitive advantage and profitability. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the current study addresses another important issue: the existence of dimensions of emotional reflectivity among service providers, which can shape approaches to enhancing service recovery. These dimensions are emotional empathy, emotional awareness, emotional responsiveness, emotional contagion, and emotional regulation, and they are described in detail, as well as their hypotheses, in the next paragraph.

2.1 EMOTIONAL MIRRORING DIMENSIONS

In the service industry, where human contact is high and frequent, the emotional control of the contact staff has become a key determinant in service quality, customer satisfaction and maintenance of long term customer relationship that leads to revenue stability. In this regard, emotional mirroring has become one of the most important skills that can help employees react more empathetically, balanced, and effectively to stressful, conflictual, or customer dissatisfaction situations and reduce the possibility of customer churn [11]. Although it is important, emotional mirroring has been traditionally under-emphasized in the traditional service management models, which have tended to focus on the technical or procedural side of the equation without adequately considering its quantifiable contribution to customer lifetime value and brand equity. Nevertheless, the most recent studies acknowledge that the emotional mirroring of service providers does not only affect the perception of customers but also leads to a healthier and more resilient organizational culture, which is oriented toward service excellence and sustainable competitive advantage [12]. In terms of the dimensions of emotional mirroring, which encompass emotional empathy, emotional awareness, emotional responsiveness, emotional contagion, and emotional regulation, which were discussed in the current study, emotional empathy is the basic dimension of emotional mirroring in service providers. It entails the capability to identify, comprehend and communicate the feelings of a customer in crucial communication circumstances. This competency allows employees to interpret and react to the emotional signals of a customer in an authentic and sensitive manner, which considerably diminishes the adverse impact of a service failure and lowers the likelihood of customer defection [13]. Within the context of service recovery, emotional empathy may be used to rebuild customer trust and satisfaction by developing an experience that confirms the customer feelings and makes them feel cared and understood, which is not only restoring the relationship but also protecting the financial value of the relationship [14]. In theory, this dimension is strongly interconnected with the theories of emotional intelligence and customer-centered approach, in which emotional connection serves as a driving force to rebuild the working relationship and retain a profitable customer base [15].

Moreover, emotional empathy is one of the most important mediators between the emotional expression of a service provider and the perception of the quality of the response received by a customer [17]. It has been revealed in numerous studies that customers are likely to perceive this attitude as a sincere desire to solve the problem when employees express their emotional concern [16][15]. Not only does this decrease dissatisfaction but also enhances the chances of loyalty and repeat purchases- both of which are essential to long-term financial sustainability in service organizations [18]. Empathy is not only an individual ability, but a relational tactic that enhances the quality of service in a human and emotional sense, increasing the perceived quality levels and generating positive financial outcomes that cannot be achieved by monetary compensation alone [19].

Resting on the above explanations, the following hypothesis can be made:

H1. Emotional empathy has a significant role in enhancing service recovery in airlines under study, leading to improved customer loyalty and measurable financial benefits.

Regarding emotional awareness, it is the capacity to recognize, interpret and assess personal and others' emotions in the job performance situation, depending on the emotional mirroring of service providers. Emotional self-awareness is a high competency that allows employees to know how their emotional conditions affect their attitudes, judgments, and behaviors towards customers, especially when it comes to delivering satisfactory service and maintaining customer relationships in the long-term [20]. Emotional awareness is closely related to the conceptual frameworks of emotional intelligence and reflective learning, as it represents a mechanism that facilitates emotional self-regulation and behavioral adaptation in the face of emotionally stressful situations while maintaining a high standard of customer care that protects the organization's reputation and revenue base [21].

In the field of service recovery, emotional awareness can gain strategic importance, enabling service providers to anticipate and appropriately manage their reactions to negative events, such as complaints, claims, and unsatisfactory experiences. By recognizing their emotional reactions and understanding their impact on the customer, employees can adopt a more empathetic, controlled, and solution-focused approach that reduces the likelihood of customer churn and strengthens loyalty [22]. Furthermore, high emotional awareness can enhance organizational learning processes, enabling employees to critically reflect on their past experiences and more effectively adjust their future responses —leading to more efficient recovery operations and lower service failure costs. Thus, this dimension not only contributes to improved individual performance but also enhances an organization's ability to deliver more consistent, humane, and professional recovery services that drive repeat business and long-term profitability [23][24].

Based on the above explanations, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2. Emotional awareness has a significant role in enhancing service recovery in airlines under study, contributing to stronger customer loyalty and improved financial performance.

While emotional responsiveness is a practical dimension in constructing emotional mirroring among service providers, it refers to the behavioral and affective manifestation that results from the conscious interpretation of the psychological state and emotions affecting the client. This response is not merely impulsive or automatic; rather, it is formed as a deliberate and intentional action to increase the internal reflective process of the provider and deliver a response that protects the relationship's long-term value [25]. In the context of service recovery, when a client's emotions have been intensified by negative experiences, the quality and effectiveness of the provider's emotional response can determine the client's final perception of the service they receive, directly impacting service recovery, trust, satisfaction, and willingness to continue doing business with the company [14][26].

From an organizational and psychological perspective, appropriate emotional responsiveness involves not only controlling and regulating emotional traits, but also the ability to express positive emotions, compete effectively, and work to solve problems in a manner that minimizes recovery costs and maximizes loyalty gains [15]. Professionals who utilize reflective competencies that harness their emotions are better able to manage conflict situations, providing calm, understanding, and professionalism [27]. This translates into a competitive advantage for service organizations, transforming customer interactions into a space for associative reconstruction, while transforming employee emotional responsiveness into a springboard for better understanding and recovery from a failed experience—a process that rebuilds loyalty, encourages repeat purchases, and safeguards the organization's financial performance [28].

Based on the above explanations, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H3. Emotional responsiveness has a significant role in enhancing service recovery in airlines under study, leading to greater customer retention and measurable revenue protection.

As well as, emotional contagion is a key component of the concept of emotional mirroring, particularly in service delivery contexts where interpersonal interactions are intense and continuous [29]. It is the propensity of people to emotionally affect and be affected by the emotional conditions of others, usually without their knowledge-a process that can define not only the perceptions of service quality but also customer loyalty and revenue stability over the long term [30]. In a service delivery context, service providers do not only respond to the emotions displayed by customers, but can also internalize and project them into their own behavior and reactions, which directly influences the quality of the customer experience, especially when it comes to service recovery after failure or dissatisfaction when customer retention is at stake [26].

Moreover, [31] stated that emotional contagion may serve as a tool that improves empathy and emotional connection between the service provider and customer, allowing a more human and sensitive approach to complaints or claims that will build trust and raise the chances of repeat business. Such an emotional interaction may help to establish trust and satisfaction, which are the crucial elements of service recovery processes and significant determinants of customer lifetime value. Nevertheless, it is also associated with risks, because in case the service provider internalizes negative emotions without having enough self-regulation skills, this may result in emotional exhaustion which will affect their performance and potentially raise the cost of recovery because of inefficiencies in the service or employee turnover [32]. Thus, the high level of emotional mirroring, including the emotional contagion awareness and the proper coping mechanisms, becomes a valuable asset in enhancing interactions in critical situations in the service and protecting the financial performance of the organization [33].

Based on the above explanations, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H4. Emotional contagion has a significant role in enhancing service recovery in airlines under study, contributing to improved customer loyalty and long-term profitability.

Concerning emotional regulation, it is one of the core aspects of emotional mirroring, especially in service delivery environments where service providers need to control a broad spectrum of their own and others emotions to safeguard service quality, sustain customer relations, and reduce the financial consequences of service failures [3]. This dimension is the capacity to recognize, comprehend, and deliberately alter emotional reactions to ensure professional and successful relationships with clients [34]. When it comes to service recovery, where users can be frustrated, angry, or dissatisfied, the capacity of a service provider to control their emotions is critical to constructively resolve conflicts and deliver empathic solutions that would increase client satisfaction and the probability of retaining the customer [35]. [14] also stressed that many studies have demonstrated that effective emotional regulation can not only lead to better psychological well-being among service providers but also improve the quality of customer interactions that makes successful service recovery more likely and saves the organization the loss of revenue through customer churn. Such emotional competence allows service providers to keep their cool in challenging circumstances, act decisively, and not to act impulsively, which may further escalate the conflict and lead to expensive reputational losses [36]. Thus, the training of emotional regulation skills must be regarded as a vital part of human resource training and management in customer service-oriented companies, particularly in industries where the user experience is paramount to reputation, loyalty, and long-term profitability [37].

According to the above explanations, it is possible to formulate the following hypothesis:

H5. Emotional regulation has a significant role in enhancing service recovery in airlines under study, leading to stronger customer loyalty and improved financial outcomes.

3 METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The primary objective of this study was to analyze the role that emotional mirroring can play in service providers, considering it a key strategy for enhancing service recovery processes in the aviation sector. Given the limited availability of previous research on this topic in Iraq and more broadly in the Middle East, this study adopts an exploratory approach based on a case study. This methodological choice is justified by the need to generate preliminary knowledge and organize background information that will serve as a basis for future research. In this sense, the study relies on descriptive data to characterize the phenomenon in question and establish initial lines of analysis.

In line with this perspective, this research paper focused on analyzing a contemporary phenomenon in its natural context, with the primary objective of illustrating the role of emotional mirroring as an approach to enhancing service recovery in a particular airline. To achieve this, a quantitative approach was adopted within the methodological framework of the case study, enabling structured data collection in line with the proposed objectives. The following subsections describe the conceptual model adopted, the data collection tools used, and the procedures for processing and analyzing the collected information.

3.1 STUDY MODEL

The study was conducted as a cross-sectional survey to gather the views of full-time employees at the airlines included in the study. The goal was to raise awareness of the real role that the emotional mirroring approach can play in enhancing service recovery. The conceptual model for this study was developed in accordance with the principles mentioned above, as illustrated below:
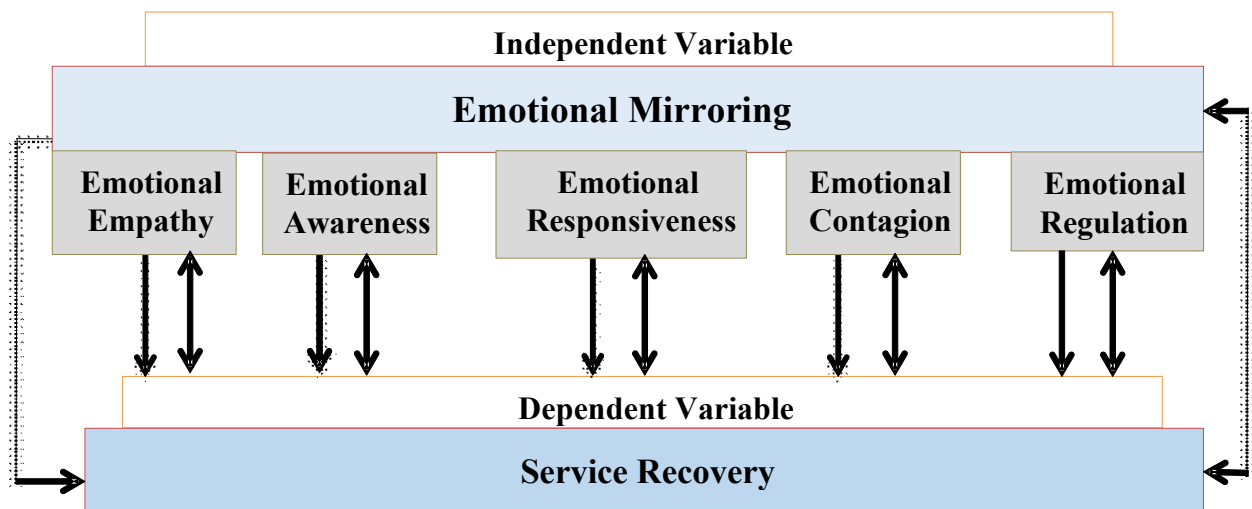
FIGURE 1. Study Model

Source: Prepared and proposed by the researchers

3.2 QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This study adopted a quantitative approach based on descriptive and analytical data to explore and explain the mechanisms underlying the relationship between emotional mirroring and service recovery. To ensure accurate and fair representation of the target population, a random sample was used. The sample consisted of employees from eight airlines operating in the Sulaymaniyah Governorate, Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Azmar Air, Moonline, Iraqi Airways, Turkish Airlines, Qatar Airways, Middle East Airlines, Mahan Air, and Royal Jordanian. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool. Its design was based on a comprehensive review of relevant scientific literature and previous empirical studies on the variables of interest. To ensure the validity and contextual relevance of the questionnaire, a preliminary version was submitted for evaluation by a panel of academic experts in management and organization. Their comments and suggestions were taken into consideration, allowing for further refinement of the instrument before its final implementation.

The questionnaire consisted of three main sections. The first section collected basic sociodemographic information from the participants (gender, age, educational background, and years of experience). The second section addressed emotional mirroring and its specific dimensions as the independent variable of the study. The third section focused on service recovery indicators as the dependent variable. To ensure methodological validity, multiple validation procedures were applied. First, the characteristics of the target participants were assessed, allowing for modifications to the content, structure, and length of the questionnaire. The instrument was originally written in English. However, given the linguistic and sociocultural context of the study population, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic through a direct and reverse translation process to ensure semantic equivalence with the original version.

A pilot test was subsequently conducted using the Arabic version of the questionnaire. For this purpose, 20 copies, accompanied by an introductory letter, were distributed to three selected airlines to assess the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Based on the results obtained, final adjustments were made to the structure of the final version of the questionnaire. The instrument was formally distributed to the management teams of the participating companies, a strategy that facilitated and improved the data collection process. A total of 102 completed questionnaires were obtained, of which 18 were excluded due to incomplete or invalid data. Therefore, 84 valid questionnaires were considered for statistical analysis, equating to an effective response rate of 82.35%. Data were analyzed using SPSS (version 28). Descriptive statistical methods were used to characterize participant profiles, and Pearson's correlation coefficients were used to identify significant relationships between study variables. In addition, simple and multiple linear regression models were applied to examine the predictive effect of emotional reflection dimensions on service recovery indicators. The analytical methods used are described in more detail in the following sections.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This section provides a brief description of the participant's demographic information. Simple frequency counts were used to categorize individuals based on their gender, age, educational background, and years of experience (Table 1).

Gender			
Male		**Female**	
Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
36	42.86	48	57.14

Age							
30 years and younger		**From 31-40**		**From 41-50**		**More than 50**	
Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
43	51.19	26	30.95	11	13.10	4	4.76

Educational Background									
High school		**Higher Diploma**		**Bachelor's**		**Master's**		**PHD**	
Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
9	10.71	39	46.43	31	36.91	5	5.95	0	0.0

Years of Experience					
1-5		**6-10**		**10 years and above**	
Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
45	53.57	31	36.90	8	9.53

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic data of the 84 participants who comprised the study sample, providing a comprehensive overview of the study population's composition in terms of gender, age, educational level, and years of professional experience. In terms of gender, females constituted the majority of participants, representing 57.14% of the sample (48 participants), while males constituted 42.86% (36 participants). This slight female predominance may reflect the increasing participation of females in the aviation services sector in the study area, which may positively influence the perception and practice of emotional mirroring in customer service work contexts, thereby potentially enhancing service recovery outcomes.

In terms of age, more than half of the participants (51.19%, n = 43) were in their thirties or younger, indicating a relatively young workforce. The age groups ranged from 31 to 40 years old (30.95%, n = 26), 41 to 50 years old (13.10%, n = 11), and, to a lesser extent, over 50 years old (4.76%, n = 4). This distribution suggests that most employees are young people with potential for career development, which may be associated with positive levels of emotional mirroring, adaptability, and openness to self-reflection, all of which are valuable for building customer loyalty and long-term relationships.

As for educational level, the majority of respondents had a higher diploma degree (46.43%, n = 39), followed by those with a bachelor's degree (36.91%, n = 31). A smaller percentage of respondents had pre-university education (10.71%, n = 9) and a master's degree (5.95%, n = 5); none reported having a doctorate degree. This educational profile indicates a workforce with a solid academic foundation, with a primary focus on advanced technical levels, which may enhance their ability to apply complex service recovery strategies and adapt emotional mirroring techniques to diverse customer needs.

While, in years of work experience, more than half of the participants (53.57%, n = 45) had between one and five years of experience, reinforcing the evidence that the workforce is predominantly young and early in their careers. 36.90% (n = 31) had between six and ten years of experience, while only 9.53% (n = 8) had more than ten years in the workforce. This distribution suggests that, despite some variation in seniority, the predominance of younger experience in the sector may positively influence organizational practices related to service recovery and the development of personal skills such as emotional self-regulation, while also offering opportunities for long-term skill investment that can yield sustained customer satisfaction and retention benefits.

4.2 PEARSON CORRELATION ANALYSIS OF VARIABLES

The Pearson correlation test is used to determine the magnitude of the relationship between emotional mirroring and its dimensions with the service recovery in airlines under study. Table 2 displays the correlation results.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix for Variables of Study

		Emotional Mirroring	Emotional Empathy	Emotional Awareness	Emotional Responsiveness	Emotional Contagion	Emotional Regulation
Service Recovery	**Pearson Correlation**	0.712**	0.801**	0.762**	0.753**	0.701**	0.723**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	84	84	84	84	84	84
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).							

The results presented in Table 2 above, based on the participants' responses to the questionnaire, revealed a strong, positive relationship between the independent variable, emotional mirroring and its dimensions, and the dependent variable, service recovery. Specifically, the results showed that emotional empathy recorded the highest correlation with service recovery (r = 0.801; p < 0.01), indicating that service providers' increased ability to perceive and understand customers emotionally is closely related to improved service recovery after failure and to maintaining long-term customer relationships. This finding supports previous empirical evidence such as [26][38][14] on the pivotal role of empathy in contexts that require intensive customer service, especially in sensitive sectors such as aviation where trust and loyalty are critical to sustainable success.

This was followed, in descending order, by emotional awareness (r = 0.762; p < 0.01), emotional responsiveness (r = 0.753; p < 0.01), and emotional regulation (r = 0.723; p < 0.01), all of which had high and statistically significant correlations. This demonstrates that personal abilities to identify, process, and respond appropriately to emotional states—both one's own and others'—are key factors in the effectiveness of service recovery procedures. These skills do not only enhance customer satisfaction but also lead to brand loyalty and repeat patronage which are quantifiable in terms of financial gain to service organizations.

Moreover, emotional contagion was positively correlated with statistically significant results (r = 0.701; p < 0.01), although it was a bit lower than the other dimensions. This finding can be understood to imply that, despite the significance of the capacity to react to the emotions of others, its effects can be more modest or conditional on mediating processes, including self-control or the organizational setting and, when effectively managed, it can continue to contribute to the preservation of the organization reputation and customer base. It is important to note that all the correlations

observed are positive, which means that the higher the emotional mirroring in their different dimensions, the more effective the service recovery processes are perceived. The magnitude of these correlations shows that there is a strong and clear relationship between the variables and this gives good empirical support to the theoretical assumptions of the proposed model. Taken together, these results do not only confirm the strategic importance of emotional mirroring as a multidimensional construct but also highlights its predictive value in customer-centric organizational settings where service quality is a direct predictor of revenue sustainability. These results are aligned with other research works in this area, including [39][12][40][41], which have emphasized the relevance of emotional mirroring skills in the management of the customer experience, particularly in the critical service areas of the sustainable business environment.

4.3 REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR EMOTIONAL MIRRORING (EM) SERVICE RECOVERY (SR)

The linear and multiple regression analysis was performed to evaluate the influence of emotional mirroring on service recovery in the aviation industry, with a special focus on its possible effect on customer loyalty and organizational performance, and to find out which aspect of emotional mirroring is more persuasive in improving service recovery in the companies of Kurdish Airlines considered. The third and fourth tables show the findings of the linear and multiple regression analyses separately, providing both statistical evidence and practical insights for targeted training and service improvement strategies.

Table 3. Linear Regression Analysis for EM with SR Model

Model	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	(F) Statistics	Sig.	(B)	(T) Value	Sig.
	0.712	0.592	0.581	119.641	0.000			
Emotional Mirroring						0.634	16.712	0.000

Independent Variable: Emotional Mirroring (EM)

Dependent Variable: Service Recovery (SR)

The findings presented in Table 3 demonstrate statistically significant evidence of the impact of emotional mirroring (EM) on service recovery (SR) in the context of the airlines analyzed. The multiple correlation coefficient (R = 0.712) indicates a strong positive relationship between both variables, suggesting that the higher the level of EM among service providers, the more effective their service recovery is and the greater the likelihood of sustaining long-term customer relationships. The coefficient of determination (R^2 = 0.592) in turn reveals that approximately 59.2% of the variance in SR can be explained by levels of EM, representing a significant contribution to overall service performance and customer satisfaction outcomes. Furthermore, the adjusted R^2 value (0.581) indicates that the model retains its explanatory power even when the number of predictors used is taken into account, supporting the robustness of the model.

The F value (F = 119.641), with a very low significance level (Sig = 0.000), also confirms the validity of the model in explaining the relationship between the variables. As for the B value (B = 0.634), it indicates that for every one-unit increase in EM, a 0.634-unit increase in SR is expected, holding other potential influences constant —a relationship that underscores the tangible value of investing in employees' emotional skill development. The t-value of 16.712 at a significance level of 0.000 confirms that the regression coefficient is significantly different from zero, providing strong empirical evidence to support the proposed hypothesis.

Based on this, the statistical findings are clear in supporting the main hypothesis (MH), which shows that the emotional mirroring (EM) of service providers has a significant and positive influence on service recovery (SR) in the airlines under investigation. Such results indicate that the emotional competencies of employees should be viewed as a strategic asset in dealing with service breakdowns and improving customer satisfaction as well as safeguarding brand equity and revenue streams by increasing loyalty. Such results are in line with the results of many earlier studies that have proven that emotional mirroring (EM) plays a significant role in service quality. As an example, [42] state that the emotions of contact employees have a direct impact on the perceptions of customers regarding service recovery, particularly when there is a breakdown or a critical incident. Moreover, [9][43] state that reflective emotional processing allows employees to react to customer complaints in an empathetic, systematic, and strategic manner, which increases the perception of fairness and positively affects the assessment of service by users. Similarly, [52] state that emotional self-mirroring after customer conflict situations will allow employees to form adaptive responses and service enhancement in the future, which will result in ongoing organizational learning and high performance in the form of customer loyalty and repeat business. Therefore, all these studies give empirical and theoretical evidence to this analysis and prove that emotional mirroring (EM) is not only a strategy to enhance the quality of service recovery (SR) but also a strategic competency in industries where customer experience and financial sustainability are highly sensitive. This further supports the necessity to incorporate emotional development programmers in the training of service employees to enhance error response capability and enhance organizational competitiveness in terms of customer satisfaction and profitability.

4.4 REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR DIMENSIONS OF EMOTIONAL MIRRORING (EM) AND SERVICE RECOVERY (SR)

The multiple regression analysis was used to determine the effect of emotional mirroring dimensions on service recovery and which of the dimensions contribute the most to enhancing customer satisfaction, loyalty, and long-term organizational performance in the Kurdish airlines under study. Table 4 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis, offering insights that can guide targeted employee training and strategic service recovery initiatives.

Table 4. Multiple Simultaneous Regression Analysis for Dimensions of EM - SR Model

Model	R	R²	Adj.R²	F	Sig.	β	t	p
	0.751	0.592	0.541	18.719	.000			
Emotional Empathy						0.604	8.715	0.000
Emotional Awareness						0.589	7.314	0.000
Emotional Responsiveness						0.551	6.908	0.000
Emotional Contagion						0.411	6.471	0.019
Emotional Regulation						0.579	7.106	0.000

Predictors: (Constant) Emotional Empathy, Emotional Awareness, Emotional Responsiveness, Emotional Contagion, Emotional Regulation

Dependent Variable: Service Recovery

The simultaneous multiple regression results in Table 4 show that the R value for the full model is 0.751, indicating a strong association between the independent variables (emotional mirroring dimensions) and the dependent variable (service recovery). The coefficient of determination, $R^2 = 0.592$, indicates that 59.2% of the variance in service recovery can be explained by the five emotional mirroring dimensions analyzed, representing a significant contribution in terms of explanatory power and highlighting their collective influence on customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty. Furthermore, the adjusted $R^2 = 0.541$ confirms the robustness of the model even when controlling for the number of predictors, suggesting that the model is not over fitted and can reliably be applied to similar customer service contexts for both operational and strategic decision-making. As well as, the F statistic, $F = 18.719$, with a high level of statistical significance ($p < 0.001$), supports the overall validity of the model, indicating that the included independent variables collectively explain a significant proportion of the variance in the dependent variable and, by extension, have the potential to influence financial performance through improved retention and reduced recovery costs.

Regarding the individual analysis of the current study's hypotheses, which show that all predictors have positive and statistically significant effects on service recovery, albeit to varying degrees:

H1. Emotional Empathy: Reading the results ($\beta = 0.604$; $p = 0.000$), this dimension is the most influential in the model, indicating that service employees' ability to perceive and respond to customers' emotions with empathy is a key factor in effective service recovery and in fostering lasting customer loyalty. These findings reinforce previous studies linking empathy to enhanced perceptions of interpersonal justice and customer satisfaction. [43] confirmed that empathy in employee–customer interactions during service recovery significantly predicts perceptions of interactional justice, which in turn strengthens customer retention. Similarly, [44] found that engaged employees create a climate of trust that reduces the negative impact of service failure and encourages repeat patronage.

H2. Emotional Awareness: The regression results ($\beta = 0.589$; $p = 0.000$) show that emotional awareness enhances service recovery, which means that the greater the tendency to care about this dimension of emotional mirroring by respondents in the airlines under study by 1%, it will lead to enhanced service recovery by 58.9%. This refers to an employee's ability to identify and understand their emotions. According to [45], this skill enables service providers to regulate their responses to upset customers and act in a more rational and customer-focused manner. [46] also emphasize that emotional awareness contributes to self-reflection, which is essential for organizational learning and consistent service quality—both of which strengthen competitive positioning.

H3. Emotional Response: According to the results of the regression analysis ($\beta = 0.551$; $p = 0.000$), the way employees express their emotions and their honest and effective response have a direct impact on the customer experience. [47] demonstrated that honest and positive emotional responses during service recovery generate positive customer feedback. [48] suggest that regular and controlled emotional expression by employees not only mitigates the negative effects of dissatisfaction but also builds a service image that drives positive word-of-mouth and repeat business.

H4. Emotional Contagion: The results (β = 0.411; p = 0.019) showed that emotional contagion leads to an important message for improving service recovery. Even though its intensity is low in the model, it has a relevant dimension for positive service recovery. [51] introduced the concept of "emotional contagion" in the service context, explaining that the emotions used directly influence the customer's emotional state. More recently, [49] demonstrated that customers absorb both positive and negative emotions, which in turn shapes their long-term loyalty and willingness to recommend the service.

H5. Emotional Regulation: The results confirmed (β = 0.579; p = 0.000) that emotional regulation plays a significant role in improving service recovery. The ability to regulate emotions in real time is crucial for maintaining professionalism during the service recovery process. [50] introduced the concept of emotional regulation, suggesting that effective emotional regulation enables employees to maintain a controlled and empathetic image even in stressful situations. Furthermore, [9] demonstrated that emotional regulation improves customers' perceptions of service providers' competence, directly contributing to satisfaction, loyalty, and brand advocacy.

Thus, the results of the five dimensions analyzed confirm the acceptability of the hypotheses formulated for them, with strong empirical support in highly interactive contexts such as the airlines under study. This provides a strong scientific foundation to appreciate emotional management as not only a means of enhancing continuity of service recovery, but also as a source of customer retention, competitive advantage and long-term financial viability.

4.5 EXPANDED STATISTICAL RESULTS AND RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Table 5. Emotional Mirroring Dimensions and Key Measurement Items

Dimension	Sample Measurement Items	β (Standardized Coefficient)	t-value	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Emotional Empathy (EE)	EE1. I can sense customers' feelings during complaints. EE2. I try to understand customers' emotional needs when they are upset. EE3. I express genuine concern when service problems occur.	0.604	8.715	0.000	Strongest predictor of service recovery effectiveness.
Emotional Awareness (EA)	EA1. I am aware of how my emotions affect my interactions with customers. EA2. I can identify the emotional tone of a customer during communication. EA3. I adjust my behavior based on emotional cues from customers.	0.589	7.314	0.000	Enhances self-reflection and adaptive service behavior.
Emotional Responsiveness (ER)	ER1. I respond quickly and appropriately to customers' emotions. ER2. I use positive emotional expressions to calm dissatisfied customers. ER3. I modify my tone and words to match customers' emotions.	0.551	6.908	0.000	Directly improves recovery interaction quality and trust.
Emotional Contagion (EC)	EC1. I often feel the same emotions that customers express. EC2. My mood changes based on customers' emotional states. EC3. Positive emotions from customers motivate me to serve better.	0.411	6.471	0.019	Moderate but meaningful impact; sensitive to self-control and context.
Emotional Regulation (ERg)	ERg1. I control my emotions when dealing with angry customers. ERg2. I can stay calm and polite in stressful service situations. ERg3. I manage my emotions to maintain a professional image.	0.579	7.106	0.000	Ensures professionalism and stabilizes service recovery outcomes.

Model Summary: R = 0.751, R² = 0.592, Adjusted R² = 0.541, F = 18.719, Sig. = 0.000
Dependent Variable: Service Recovery (SR)

4.6 RELIABILITY AND INTERNAL CONSISTENCY

Dimension	Cronbach's Alpha (α)
Emotional Empathy (EE)	0.89
Emotional Awareness (EA)	0.87
Emotional Responsiveness (ER)	0.84
Emotional Regulation (ERg)	0.83
Emotional Contagion (EC)	0.81

The reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha confirmed strong internal consistency across all five emotional mirroring dimensions, with coefficients ranging from 0.81 to 0.89. All values exceed the recommended threshold of 0.70, confirming that the measurement instrument is both reliable and psychometrically robust.

CONCLUSIONS
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the study are powerful and statistically significant empirical evidence of the importance of emotional mirroring in enhancing service recovery processes within the context of airlines in the Kurdistan Region. These findings show that emotional mirroring has a high explanatory capacity in a social and relational psychological phenomenon that is becoming more and more accepted as a source of competitive advantage and customer retention in the sustainable business environment. This finding highlights the strategic importance of developing specific emotional competencies among employees across all airline sectors, including the airlines under study, where customer interactions are often characterized by critical moments, tension, and high expectations.

Furthermore, both Pearson correlation analyses and multiple regression models confirm strong, positive relationships between the analyzed emotional mirroring dimensions and the effectiveness of service recovery after a failure. In particular, emotional empathy emerges as the most predictive dimension, underscoring its role as a strategic capability for protecting brand reputation and safeguarding revenue streams through enhanced customer satisfaction and loyalty. This finding suggests that service employees' ability to perceive and understand customers' needs emotionally is essential for effectively repairing the damage caused by a service failure. Following in order of influence are emotional awareness, emotional responsiveness, emotional regulation, and, to a lesser extent, emotional contagion, all of which have significant effects consistent with contemporary academic literature. Thus, these findings confirm that emotional skills are not only desirable qualities but also measurable, high-impact organizational assets that enable effective management of service interruptions, reduce customer dissatisfaction, improve perceptions of restorative justice, and foster long-term loyalty ultimately contributing to sustainable profitability and market differentiation.

ACADEMIC AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

From an academic perspective, this study advances the literature on emotion management in customer service by proposing an integrative approach to emotional mirroring as a multidimensional and measurable indicator of service recovery effectiveness. Furthermore, these findings pave the way for future research aimed at exploring potential mediating or moderating influences such as organizational climate, service culture, leadership style, or employee emotional resilience that may influence the intensity or direction of these relationships.

From a practical perspective, these findings provide compelling justification for the integration of emotional intelligence training and development programs particularly focusing on empathy, self-regulation, and emotional awareness as an essential part of a holistic service quality strategy. These capabilities can be systematically developed through targeted organizational interventions such as emotional coaching, structured emotional communication training, and workplace stress management programs. By embedding these competencies into HR practices, airlines can strengthen their service recovery systems, improve customer loyalty, and sustain competitive advantage in high-pressure, service-intensive industries.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study is limited to airlines in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other regions or service industries. The cross-sectional design also prevents causal inferences. Future studies should apply longitudinal or experimental methods, expand the sample to different cultural contexts, and examine potential mediating and moderating variables such as organizational climate, leadership style, or employee resilience. Such research could provide a deeper understanding of how emotional mirroring contributes to sustainable service recovery and financial outcomes.

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