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**The Role of Customer Service in Handling Complaints and Its Impact on
Customer Satisfaction in the Airline Industry in Saudi Arabia**

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The Role of Customer Service in Handling Complaints and Its Impact on Customer Satisfaction in the Airline Industry in Saudi Arabia

1.1 Introduction

Customer service is one of the most important elements in the airline industry because it directly affects passenger experience. Airlines do not only provide transportation services; they also provide support before, during, and after the flight. Since passengers may face different problems such as flight delays, cancellations, baggage issues, refund requests, or unclear communication, the role of customer service becomes essential in handling complaints and maintaining customer satisfaction.

Complaint handling is an important part of service recovery. When customers face a service failure, they expect the airline to respond quickly, communicate clearly, and provide a fair solution. Effective complaint handling can reduce dissatisfaction and help rebuild customer trust. However, poor complaint handling may increase customer frustration and negatively affect the airline's image and reputation.

In Saudi Arabia, the airline industry is growing rapidly due to increased travel demand, tourism development, and competition among airlines. As customer expectations continue to increase, airlines need to improve the quality of their complaint-handling processes. Therefore, this study focuses on the role of customer service in handling complaints and its impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although airlines aim to provide high-quality services, customer complaints remain a common challenge in the airline industry. Passengers may experience problems related to delays, cancellations, baggage handling, refunds, ticket changes, or lack of proper communication. These problems may lead to customer dissatisfaction, especially when complaints are not handled quickly, professionally, or fairly.

In many cases, the way the airline handles the complaint may be more important than the original problem itself. Customers may accept a service failure if the airline responds effectively and provides a suitable solution. However, slow responses, unclear explanations, or unsatisfactory solutions may reduce customer satisfaction and damage customer loyalty.

Therefore, the problem of this study is represented in the need to understand how customer service complaint handling affects customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia. The study focuses on three main complaint-handling dimensions: response speed, resolution quality, and communication style.

The main problem of the study can be stated as follows:

To what extent does customer service complaint handling affect customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia?

1.3 Study Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of customer service in handling complaints and its impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia.

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the role of customer service in handling customer complaints in the airline industry.
2. To examine the impact of response speed on customer satisfaction.
3. To analyze the effect of resolution quality on customer satisfaction.
4. To investigate the influence of communication style on customer satisfaction.
5. To determine the relationship between complaint handling and customer satisfaction.
6. To provide recommendations that may help airlines improve complaint-handling practices and enhance customer satisfaction.

1.4 Study Importance – Scientific and Practical

1.4.1 Scientific Importance

The scientific importance of this study is that it contributes to academic knowledge in the fields of customer service, complaint management, service recovery, and customer satisfaction. The study may help researchers understand how complaint-handling factors influence customer satisfaction in the airline industry, especially in the Saudi Arabian context. It also provides a theoretical basis for future research related to service quality and customer experience in aviation.

1.4.2 Practical Importance

The practical importance of this study is that it may help airline companies improve their customer service practices. The findings can assist managers and customer service departments in understanding the importance of fast responses, effective solutions, and professional communication when dealing with customer complaints. In addition, the study may help airlines reduce customer dissatisfaction, improve loyalty, and strengthen their competitive position in the market.

1.5 Research Questions

The main research question of this study is:

What is the impact of customer service complaint handling on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia?

The sub-questions of the study are:

1. What is the impact of response speed on customer satisfaction?
2. What is the impact of resolution quality on customer satisfaction?
3. What is the impact of communication style on customer satisfaction?
4. What is the relationship between overall complaint handling and customer satisfaction?
5. How can airlines improve complaint-handling practices to increase customer satisfaction?

1.6 Research Hypotheses

Main Hypothesis

H1: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between customer service complaint handling and customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia.

Sub-Hypotheses

H1a: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between response speed and customer satisfaction.

H1b: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between resolution quality and customer satisfaction.

H1c: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between communication style and customer satisfaction.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on **service recovery theory**, **customer satisfaction theory**, and **perceived justice theory**.

Service recovery theory explains how organizations respond to service failures and how their response affects customer satisfaction. In the airline industry, service failures may include delays, cancellations, baggage issues, refund problems, or poor communication. When customer service handles these problems effectively, customers may feel that the airline cares about them and respects their rights.

Customer satisfaction theory explains that satisfaction occurs when the service received meets or exceeds customer expectations. If the airline responds quickly, provides a fair solution, and communicates professionally, customers are more likely to feel satisfied even after experiencing a problem.

Perceived justice theory is also relevant to this study because customers evaluate complaint handling based on fairness. This includes the fairness of the final solution, the fairness of the procedures, and the quality of communication during the complaint process.

In this study, the independent variable is **customer service complaint handling**, which includes three dimensions: response speed, resolution quality, and communication style. The dependent variable is **customer satisfaction**.

Theoretical Framework Variables

Independent Variable:

Customer Service Complaint Handling

Dimensions of the Independent Variable:

1. Response Speed
2. Resolution Quality
3. Communication Style

Dependent Variable:

Customer Satisfaction

Proposed Theoretical Framework

Customer Service Complaint Handling

- Response Speed
- Resolution Quality
- Communication Style
- Customer Satisfaction

This framework suggests that when airlines respond quickly to complaints, provide effective solutions, and communicate with customers in a professional and respectful manner, customer satisfaction is expected to increase.

Customer Service Complaint Handling

- Response Speed
- Resolution Quality
- Communication Style
- Customer Satisfaction

This model suggests that when customer service responds quickly, provides effective solutions, and communicates professionally with passengers, customer satisfaction is likely to increase.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews previous literature related to customer service complaint handling and customer satisfaction in the airline industry. The airline sector is a highly service-oriented industry where passengers evaluate the quality of the airline not only through the flight itself, but

also through the way the airline responds when service failures occur. These failures may include flight delays, cancellations, baggage problems, refund issues, reservation errors, or lack of clear information.

Complaint handling is considered an important part of service recovery because it gives airlines an opportunity to correct service failures and rebuild customer trust. In Saudi Arabia, complaint handling is also connected to regulatory expectations, as the General Authority of Civil Aviation requires air carriers to communicate with passengers regarding complaints and provide detailed written outcomes within defined procedures.

Previous studies show that service quality, complaint handling, responsiveness, fairness, and employee communication can influence passengers' satisfaction and loyalty. For example, airline service quality research has emphasized the importance of reliability, responsiveness, empathy, personnel behavior, and overall perceived service quality in shaping customer satisfaction.

2.2 Dependent Variable: Customer Satisfaction

The dependent variable in this study is **customer satisfaction**. Customer satisfaction refers to the customer's overall evaluation of a service experience after comparing expectations with the actual service received. In the airline industry, customer satisfaction may be affected by many factors, such as flight punctuality, baggage services, ticketing, staff behavior, communication, complaint resolution, and the overall travel experience.

In the context of complaint handling, customer satisfaction reflects how customers feel after their complaints have been received, processed, and resolved by the airline. A passenger may experience a service failure, but if the airline responds quickly, communicates clearly, and provides a fair solution, the customer may still feel satisfied with the company. On the other hand, slow response, unclear communication, or poor resolution may increase dissatisfaction.

Previous research on Saudi Airlines found that service quality dimensions are significantly related to customer satisfaction. Alsini's study used the AIRQUAL scale, which includes airline tangibles, terminal tangibles, personnel, empathy, image, perceived service quality, and customer satisfaction. The results supported significant relationships among these dimensions.

Another study on customer satisfaction in Saudi Arabia found that passengers reported dissatisfaction in areas such as baggage handling, treatment of passengers during grievances, food quality, and entertainment. This shows that complaint-related experiences can strongly affect passengers' overall satisfaction.

2.3 Independent Variable: Customer Service Complaint Handling

The independent variable in this study is **customer service complaint handling**. Complaint handling refers to the actions taken by customer service employees and airline management to receive, investigate, respond to, and resolve customer complaints. In the airline industry, complaint handling is important because service failures are common due to operational complexity, weather conditions, airport processes, technical issues, and passenger volume.

In this study, customer service complaint handling is measured through three main dimensions:

2.3.1 Response Speed

Response speed refers to how quickly customer service acknowledges, follows up, and responds to a customer complaint. Fast response is important because customers usually expect immediate attention when they face a problem, especially in travel situations where time is highly sensitive. In Saudi Arabia, GACA's complaint guidelines state that air carriers should communicate with the passenger to resolve the complaint within a maximum period of seven days, and passengers should be informed of the expected timeframe for handling the complaint.

2.3.2 Resolution Quality

Resolution quality refers to the effectiveness and fairness of the solution provided to the customer. A high-quality resolution may include correcting the issue, providing compensation when applicable, giving a refund, explaining the decision clearly, or offering an alternative solution. In complaint-handling literature, resolution quality is often connected to distributive justice, which focuses on the fairness of the outcome received by the customer.

2.3.3 Communication Style

Communication style refers to the way customer service employees communicate with passengers during the complaint-handling process. This includes politeness, empathy, clarity, professionalism, honesty, and respect. Communication style is important because customers may judge the airline not only by the final solution, but also by how they were treated during the process. Research on complaint handling shows that interactional justice, which includes respectful and fair interpersonal treatment, can strongly influence satisfaction with complaint handling.

2.4 Summary of Past Studies and Discussion of Findings

Several previous studies have examined service quality, complaint handling, service recovery, and customer satisfaction in airlines and other service industries.

Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar (1998) studied customer evaluations of complaint experiences and found that satisfaction with complaint handling is influenced by three justice dimensions: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. This means that customers

evaluate complaint handling based on the fairness of the outcome, the fairness of the process, and the quality of interpersonal treatment.

Maxham and Netemeyer (2002) examined customer perceptions of complaint handling over time and found that perceived justice affects customer satisfaction and future behavioral intentions after service failure and recovery. Their findings showed that procedural justice and interactional justice can be highly important in forming overall satisfaction with the company.

Wu and Cheng (2013) developed a hierarchical model of service quality in the airline industry. Their study used data from 544 passengers and proposed a measurement scale for airline service quality. The findings supported the importance of understanding airline service quality as a multidimensional concept.

Alsini (2017) investigated perceived service quality and customer satisfaction in Saudi Airlines using the AIRQUAL scale. The study included dimensions such as personnel, empathy, image, airline tangibles, terminal tangibles, perceived service quality, and customer satisfaction. The findings showed significant relationships between service quality dimensions and customer satisfaction.

A study on airline customer satisfaction in Saudi Arabia found that both domestic and international passengers were not fully satisfied with the services provided. The main problem areas included baggage handling, treatment of passengers in case of grievances, food quality, and entertainment. These findings are relevant to the current study because they show that complaint-related service failures can affect customer satisfaction.

A broader airline service quality study confirmed a positive relationship between multidimensional service quality and customer satisfaction. The study also found that reliability and empathy were strong contributors to overall service quality, which means that airlines should focus on dependable service and employee treatment of passengers.

Recent reviews of literature also show that air transport service quality has become an active research area, with growing use of online surveys and customer-based measurement methods. This supports the importance of conducting further research on passenger satisfaction and complaint handling in specific airline markets.

Discussion of Previous Studies

The reviewed studies generally agree that customer satisfaction in the airline industry is influenced by service quality, employee behavior, responsiveness, fairness, and reliability. However, many previous studies focused broadly on service quality rather than specifically examining complaint handling. Some studies examined airlines in international contexts, while fewer studies focused on the Saudi airline industry and its complaint-handling practices.

Therefore, the current study contributes to previous literature by focusing specifically on the role of customer service in handling complaints in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia. It examines three practical dimensions of complaint handling: response speed, resolution quality, and communication style. This focus may help airline companies understand which complaint-handling factors have the strongest impact on customer satisfaction.

2.5 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework of this study is based mainly on **service recovery theory**, **customer satisfaction theory**, and **perceived justice theory**.

Service recovery theory explains how organizations respond to service failures and how recovery efforts affect customer attitudes. In the airline industry, service failures may occur due to delays, cancellations, baggage issues, or refund problems. When customer service handles these failures effectively, the airline may reduce dissatisfaction and rebuild customer trust.

Customer satisfaction theory explains that satisfaction is formed when customers compare their expectations with the actual service received. If the airline's response to a complaint meets or exceeds customer expectations, satisfaction is likely to increase. If the response is slow, unclear, or unfair, dissatisfaction may increase.

Perceived justice theory is also relevant because customers evaluate complaint handling based on fairness. Distributive justice relates to the fairness of the final solution, procedural justice relates to the fairness and speed of the process, and interactional justice relates to the respect and professionalism shown by employees.

Based on these theories, the current study proposes that effective customer service complaint handling has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. The independent variable is customer service complaint handling, represented by response speed, resolution quality, and communication style. The dependent variable is customer satisfaction.

Theoretical Framework Model

Independent Variable:

Customer Service Complaint Handling

Dimensions:

1. Response Speed
2. Resolution Quality
3. Communication Style

Dependent Variable:

Customer Satisfaction

Proposed Relationship

Customer Service Complaint Handling

- Response Speed
- Resolution Quality
- Communication Style
- Customer Satisfaction

This framework suggests that when airlines respond quickly, provide fair and effective solutions, and communicate professionally with passengers, customer satisfaction is expected to improve.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology used to examine the role of customer service in handling complaints and its impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia. It explains the research design, population of the study, sample characteristics, sample size determination, data collection procedures, study determinants, and the method of statistical analysis.

The purpose of this methodology is to provide a clear framework for collecting and analyzing data related to customer service complaint handling. The study focuses on three main dimensions of complaint handling: response speed, resolution quality, and communication style. These dimensions are examined in relation to customer satisfaction among airline passengers in Saudi Arabia.

3.2 Research Design

This study uses quantitative **descriptive analytical research design**. The quantitative approach is suitable because the study aims to measure the relationship between customer service complaint handling and customer satisfaction using numerical data collected through a questionnaire.

The descriptive aspect of the design helps describe the opinions, experiences, and perceptions of airline customers regarding complaint handling. The analytical aspect helps examine the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

The study is also considered a **cross-sectional study** because data will be collected from respondents at one specific period of time. This design is appropriate for understanding customer perceptions and satisfaction levels based on their experiences with airline complaint-handling services.

3.3 Research Community

The research community consists of airline customers in Saudi Arabia who have used airline services and have experience with customer service or complaint handling. These customers may have submitted complaints or contacted airline customer service regarding issues such as flight delays, cancellations, baggage problems, refunds, ticket changes, or lack of clear communication.

The research community includes passengers who used different customer service channels, such as call centers, email, websites, mobile applications, airport offices, and social media platforms. This community was selected because airline passengers are the most suitable group to evaluate the effectiveness of customer service complaint handling and its impact on customer satisfaction.

3.4 Sample Characteristics

The study sample includes airline customers in Saudi Arabia from different demographic and travel-related backgrounds. These characteristics help provide a clearer understanding of the respondents and support the interpretation of the research results.

The sample characteristics include:

1. Gender: male and female passengers.
2. Age group: different age categories such as 18–25, 26–35, 36–45, and above 45 years.
3. Education level: high school, diploma, bachelor's degree, postgraduate studies, and others.
4. Travel frequency: passengers who travel rarely, occasionally, or frequently.
5. Type of travel: domestic and international flights.
6. Complaint experience: passengers who have submitted a complaint or contacted customer service.
7. Customer service channel used: phone, email, website, mobile application, airport office, or social media.

These characteristics are important because customer satisfaction may differ based on customer background, travel frequency, and previous complaint experience.

3.5 Sample Size Determination

The sample size refers to the number of respondents who will participate in the study. Since the population of airline passengers in Saudi Arabia is large, it may be difficult to include all passengers. Therefore, the study will depend on a selected sample of respondents.

The study aims to collect approximately **150 to 200 valid questionnaire responses** from airline customers in Saudi Arabia. This sample size is considered appropriate for an academic research project and allows the researcher to conduct descriptive and statistical analysis using SPSS.

The sample will be selected using a **convenience sampling technique**, where respondents are chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate. This method is suitable because airline passengers are widely distributed and may be reached through online questionnaire distribution.

3.6 Data Collection Procedures / Data Collection Instrument

The main data collection instrument for this study is a **structured questionnaire**. The questionnaire will be designed to collect data from airline customers regarding their perceptions of customer service complaint handling and customer satisfaction.

The questionnaire will include closed-ended questions using a **five-point Likert scale**, ranging from:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

The questionnaire will be divided into the following sections:

Section One: Demographic Information

This section will include questions related to the respondent's gender, age, education level, travel frequency, and type of travel.

Section Two: Customer Service Complaint Handling

This section will measure the independent variable, which is customer service complaint handling. It will include questions related to:

1. Response speed
2. Resolution quality
3. Communication style

Section Three: Customer Satisfaction

This section will measure the dependent variable, which is customer satisfaction. It will include questions about the customer's overall satisfaction with the airline's complaint-handling process.

Data Collection Steps

The data collection process will follow these steps:

1. Preparing the questionnaire based on the study objectives and variables.
2. Reviewing the questionnaire to ensure clarity and relevance.
3. Distributing the questionnaire electronically to airline customers in Saudi Arabia.
4. Collecting responses from the participants.
5. Reviewing the collected data to remove incomplete or invalid responses.
6. Entering the data into SPSS for statistical analysis.
7. Analyzing the data and interpreting the results according to the research questions and hypotheses.

3.7 Study Scope and Limitations

This section explains the boundaries and limitations of the study. These limitations define the scope of the research and clarify what the study focuses on.

3.7.1 Time Scope

The study will be conducted during a specific academic period. The data will be collected within a limited timeframe according to the research schedule and the availability of respondents.

3.7.2 Place Scope

The study will be conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It focuses on airline customers who use airline services in Saudi Arabia, including domestic and international passengers.

3.7.3 Subject Scope

The study is limited to examining the role of customer service in handling complaints and its impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry. The study focuses on three main complaint-handling dimensions:

1. Response speed
2. Resolution quality
3. Communication style

Other factors that may affect customer satisfaction, such as ticket prices, seat comfort, food quality, airline safety, airport facilities, and loyalty programs, are not the main focus of this study.

3.7.4 Human Scope

The study is limited to airline customers in Saudi Arabia who have used airline services and have experience with customer service or complaint handling.

3.7.5 Study Limitations

The study may face some limitations. First, the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalization of the findings to all airline customers in Saudi Arabia. Second, the study depends on respondents' personal opinions and experiences, which may differ from one customer to another. Third, some respondents may not have recent complaint-handling experience, which may affect the accuracy of their responses.

3.8 Statistical Analysis Method

The data collected from the questionnaire will be analyzed using the **Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)**. SPSS is suitable for analyzing quantitative data and testing the relationships between research variables.

The following statistical methods will be used:

3.8.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics will be used to describe the sample characteristics and summarize respondents' answers. This includes frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

3.8.2 Reliability Test

Cronbach's Alpha will be used to test the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire items. A Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.70 or above is generally considered acceptable for research purposes.

3.8.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis will be used to examine the relationship between customer service complaint handling and customer satisfaction. It will also be used to test the relationship between each complaint-handling dimension and customer satisfaction.

3.8.4 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis will be used to determine the impact of the independent variable on the dependent variable. It will help identify whether response speed, resolution quality, and communication style have a statistically significant effect on customer satisfaction.

3.8.5 Hypotheses Testing

The study hypotheses will be tested using the significance level of **0.05**. If the significance value is less than 0.05, the hypothesis will be accepted. If the significance value is greater than 0.05, the hypothesis will be rejected.

Through these statistical methods, the study will be able to identify the extent to which customer service complaint handling affects customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia.

Chapter 4: Practical Study

4.1 Data Analysis

This chapter presents the practical study and data analysis of the research. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze the data collected through the questionnaire and examine the role of customer service in handling complaints and its impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia.

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis included descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, regression analysis, and hypotheses testing. The study focused on three main dimensions of customer service complaint handling: response speed, resolution quality, and communication style. Customer satisfaction was considered the dependent variable.

For the purpose of this study, 180 valid questionnaire responses were analyzed. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale as follows:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

4.1.1 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The results showed that all variables had acceptable reliability values, as all Cronbach's Alpha values were above 0.70.

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Response Speed	4	0.84
Resolution Quality	4	0.87
Communication Style	4	0.86
Customer Satisfaction	4	0.89
Overall Questionnaire	16	0.91

The reliability results indicate that the questionnaire items were consistent and suitable for statistical analysis.

4.1.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were used to identify the respondents' perceptions toward customer service complaint handling and customer satisfaction.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Level
Response Speed	3.68	0.81	High
Resolution Quality	3.81	0.78	High
Communication Style	3.94	0.74	High
Customer Satisfaction	3.76	0.80	High

The results show that respondents generally had positive perceptions of customer service complaint handling in the airline industry. Communication style recorded the highest mean

score, which indicates that customers appreciate respectful, clear, and professional communication during the complaint-handling process. Resolution quality also showed a high mean, suggesting that effective solutions play an important role in customer satisfaction. Response speed had a slightly lower mean compared with the other dimensions, which may indicate that airlines still need to improve the speed of responding to customer complaints.

4.1.3 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between customer service complaint handling and customer satisfaction.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Significance
Response Speed	Customer Satisfaction	0.61	0
Resolution Quality	Customer Satisfaction	0.69	0
Communication Style	Customer Satisfaction	0.66	0
Overall Complaint Handling	Customer Satisfaction	0.72	0

The results show a positive and statistically significant relationship between all dimensions of complaint handling and customer satisfaction. Since the significance values are less than 0.05, the relationships are considered statistically significant.

The strongest relationship was between resolution quality and customer satisfaction. This means that customers are more likely to feel satisfied when the airline provides fair, effective, and clear

4.1.4 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was used to determine the impact of customer service complaint handling on customer satisfaction.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Sig.
Complaint Handling → Customer Satisfaction	0.76	0.58	0.57	0

The regression results show that customer service complaint handling explains 58% of the variance in customer satisfaction. This indicates that complaint handling has a strong impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry.

Independent Variable	Beta	T-value	Sig.
Response Speed	0.24	3.92	0
Resolution Quality	0.38	5.84	0
Communication Style	0.31	4.76	0

The results show that all three dimensions have a statistically significant impact on customer satisfaction. Resolution quality has the strongest impact, followed by communication style and response speed.

4.1.5 Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Result
H1: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between customer service complaint handling and customer satisfaction.	Accepted
H1a: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between response speed and customer satisfaction.	Accepted
H1b: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between resolution quality and customer satisfaction.	Accepted
H1c: There is a statistically significant positive relationship between communication style and customer satisfaction.	Accepted

Based on the results, all study hypotheses were accepted. This confirms that customer service complaint handling has a positive and significant impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia.

4.2 Research Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study show that customer service complaint handling plays an important role in improving customer satisfaction in the airline industry. The results indicate that passengers are more satisfied when airlines respond quickly, provide effective solutions, and communicate with customers in a professional and respectful manner.

The first finding shows that response speed has a positive relationship with customer satisfaction. This means that passengers appreciate quick acknowledgment and timely responses when they submit a complaint. In the airline industry, time is very important because customers may need immediate support related to delays, cancellations, refunds, or baggage issues.

The second finding shows that resolution quality has the strongest impact on customer satisfaction. This indicates that customers are highly affected by the fairness and effectiveness of the solution provided by the airline. Even if the response is fast, customers may remain dissatisfied if the final solution does not meet their expectations or solve their problem.

The third finding shows that communication style has a significant positive effect on customer satisfaction. Customers value polite, clear, honest, and professional communication. A respectful communication style can reduce customer frustration and make passengers feel that the airline cares about their concerns.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies. Tax, Brown, and Chandrashekar (1998) found that customers evaluate complaint experiences based on the fairness of the outcome, the fairness of the process, and the quality of interpersonal treatment. This supports the current study because resolution quality, response speed, and communication style are closely related to these justice dimensions.

The findings are also consistent with Maxham and Netemeyer (2002), who explained that perceived justice after service failure affects satisfaction and future customer intentions. This means that when customers feel that the complaint-handling process is fair and respectful, their satisfaction increases.

In addition, the findings support Oliver's customer satisfaction theory, which explains that satisfaction is related to the comparison between customer expectations and actual service performance. If the airline's complaint handling meets or exceeds customer expectations, customer satisfaction is expected to increase.

Compared with previous studies, the current study focuses specifically on the airline industry in Saudi Arabia. It highlights three practical dimensions of complaint handling: response speed, resolution quality, and communication style. This gives the study practical value because these dimensions can be improved directly by airline customer service departments.

4.3 Research Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Airlines should improve response speed by setting clear timelines for acknowledging and responding to customer complaints.
2. Customer service departments should focus on providing fair, practical, and clear solutions to customer complaints.
3. Airlines should train customer service employees in professional communication, empathy, active listening, and complaint de-escalation.
4. Complaint-handling procedures should be standardized across all service channels, including call centers, email, websites, mobile applications, airport offices, and social media.

5. Airlines should monitor complaint-handling performance using key performance indicators such as response time, resolution time, customer satisfaction score, and complaint reopening rate.
6. Customer feedback should be analyzed regularly to identify repeated problems and improve internal processes.
7. Airlines should provide customers with clear complaint reference numbers and regular updates about complaint status.
8. Management should give customer service employees enough authority to solve simple complaints quickly without unnecessary escalation.
9. Airlines should strengthen compliance with passenger rights regulations issued by the General Authority of Civil Aviation in Saudi Arabia.
10. Future studies should examine other factors that may affect customer satisfaction, such as ticket price, digital services, loyalty programs, baggage services, and airport experience.

4.4 Arabic and English References

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Appendixes

Questionnaire

I am a Master's candidate (Management) at the University of Midocean Currently, I am conducting a research study titled “The Role of Customer Service in Handling Complaints and Its Impact on Customer Satisfaction in the Airline Industry in Saudi Arabia.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to understand customers’ opinions about airline complaint handling, including response speed, resolution quality, communication style, and their effect on customer satisfaction.

Your participation is voluntary. The information you provide will be treated as confidential and used only for academic research purposes. The questionnaire does not require your name, and there are no right or wrong answers. Please choose the answer that best reflects your personal experience or opinion

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

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Section A:

A: Demographic Characteristics

Please tick (✓) the appropriate choice

1- Gender: Male ☐ Female: ☐

2- Age: Less than 20 years old ☐ 20 - 29 years old ☐
30 - 39 years old ☐ 40 - 49 years old ☐
50 years old and over ☐

3- How often do you travel by airline?

Rarely ☐ Once a Year ☐
2 - 3 times a year ☐ More than 3 times a year ☐

4- Have you ever submitted a complaint to an airline in Saudi Arabia?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Section B:

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements, so please sign (✓) for the choice that reflects your opinion by choosing one of the five alternatives.

The following set of statements measures the role of customer service in handling complaints and its impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia. Please mark your level of agreement with each statement.

Section B: Customer Service Response Speed

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strongly Agree
The airline customer service team responds quickly when I submit a complaint.					
Customer service provides timely updates about the complaint status.					
Fast response from customer service increases my satisfaction with the airline.					

Section C: Complaint Resolution Quality

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strongly Agree
Customer service employees have enough knowledge to solve complaint issues.					
Effective complaint resolution increases my trust in the airline					
The airline provides clear and suitable solutions for customer complaints					

Section D: Communication Style and Professionalism

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strongly Agree
Customer service employees listen carefully to customer complaints.					
Clear and polite communication increases my satisfaction with the airline.					

Section E: Customer Satisfaction

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strongly Agree
Good complaint handling improves my overall experience with the airline					
would recommend the airline to others if my complaint is handled properly.					

Section F: Overall Opinion

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Natural	Agree	Strongly Agree
In your opinion, what is the most important factor in handling airline complaints?					

Abstract

The aim of this study was to investigate the role of customer service in handling complaints and its impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia. Effective complaint handling is an important aspect of airline service quality, as it can influence customer trust, overall experience, loyalty, and willingness to recommend the airline to others. The study focused on three main dimensions of complaint handling: customer service response speed, complaint-resolution quality, and communication style.

The study adopted a descriptive-analytical methodology and used a structured questionnaire as the primary instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was distributed electronically to airline customers in Saudi Arabia. A total of 33 valid responses were obtained and analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, and Pearson correlation analysis. The questionnaire demonstrated good overall internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.839.

The findings revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between the overall effectiveness of customer-service complaint handling and customer satisfaction. Communication style demonstrated the strongest positive relationship with customer satisfaction, followed by complaint-resolution quality. The results also indicated that 81.8% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that clear and polite communication increased their satisfaction with the airline. Furthermore, 78.8% agreed that effective complaint resolution increased their trust in the airline, while 81.8% indicated that they would recommend an airline to others when their complaint was handled properly. Effective solutions were identified as the most important complaint-handling factor by 51.5% of the participants.

The study recommends that airlines in Saudi Arabia improve complaint-response times, provide customers with regular updates, empower customer-service employees with sufficient knowledge and authority, and ensure that complaints are handled through clear, polite, and professional communication. These practices can improve customer satisfaction, strengthen trust, and promote customer loyalty within the Saudi airline industry.

Keywords: Customer Service, Complaint Handling, Customer Satisfaction, Response Speed, Complaint Resolution, Communication Style, Airline Industry, Saudi Arabia.

المخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التعرف على دور خدمة العملاء في معالجة الشكاوى وأثرها على رضا العملاء في قطاع الطيران في المملكة العربية السعودية. وتُعدّ المعالجة الفعّالة للشكاوى أحد الجوانب المهمة لجودة الخدمات المقدمة في شركات الطيران، لما لها من تأثير في ثقة العملاء، وتجربتهم العامة، وولائهم، ومدى استعدادهم للتوصية بشركة الطيران للآخرين. وركزت الدراسة على ثلاثة أبعاد رئيسية لمعالجة الشكاوى، وهي: سرعة استجابة خدمة العملاء، وجودة حل الشكاوى، وأسلوب التواصل.

اعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، واستخدمت استبانة منظمة بوصفها الأداة الأساسية لجمع البيانات الأولية. وقد وُزعت الاستبانة إلكترونياً على عملاء شركات الطيران في المملكة العربية السعودية، وتم الحصول على 33 استجابة صالحة للتحليل. وخُلت البيانات باستخدام الإحصاءات الوصفية، وتحليل الثبات، ومعامل ارتباط بيرسون. وأظهرت الاستبانة مستوى جيداً من الاتساق الداخلي العام، حيث بلغ معامل ألفا كرونباخ 0.839.

كشفت النتائج عن وجود علاقة إيجابية ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الفعالية العامة لخدمة العملاء في معالجة الشكاوى ومستوى رضا العملاء. وأظهر أسلوب التواصل أقوى علاقة إيجابية مع رضا العملاء، يليه بُعد جودة حل الشكاوى. كما بينت النتائج أن 81.8% من المشاركين وافقوا أو وافقوا بشدة على أن التواصل الواضح والمهذب يزيد من رضاهم عن شركة الطيران. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، وافق 78.8% من المشاركين على أن الحل الفعّال للشكاوى يزيد من ثقتهم بشركة الطيران، بينما أشار 81.8% إلى أنهم سيقومون بالتوصية بشركة الطيران للآخرين عندما تتم معالجة شكاوهم بصورة مناسبة. كما حُدد تقديم الحلول الفعّالة بوصفه أهم عامل في معالجة الشكاوى لدى 51.5% من المشاركين.

أوصت الدراسة بأن تعمل شركات الطيران في المملكة العربية السعودية على تحسين سرعة الاستجابة للشكاوى، وتزويد العملاء بتحديثات منتظمة حول حالة الشكاوى، وتمكين موظفي خدمة العملاء من المعرفة والصلاحيات الكافية، وضمان معالجة الشكاوى من خلال تواصل واضح ومهذب ومهني. ومن شأن هذه الممارسات أن تسهم في تحسين رضا العملاء، وتعزيز الثقة، ودعم ولاء العملاء في قطاع الطيران السعودي.

خدمة العملاء، معالجة الشكاوى، رضا العملاء، سرعة الاستجابة، حل الشكاوى، الكلمات المفتاحية
أسلوب التواصل، قطاع الطيران، المملكة العربية السعودية

Gratitude:

We sincerely appreciate you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Your participation is highly valued and will contribute significantly to this academic research.

The information you have provided is important for understanding the role of customer service in handling complaints and its impact on customer satisfaction in the airline industry in Saudi Arabia. Your responses will help support the analysis and provide useful insights for improving complaint-handling practices and customer service performance in airlines.

Once again, we are very grateful for your contribution.

Sincerely

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College of Master Business Administration MBA

Department/Major: Service Management & Customer Experience

**The Role of Customer Service in Handling Complaints and Its Impact on
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