

## Customer Complaint Behaviors in Turkish Airline Industry

### Türk Havacılık Sektöründe Müşteri Şikayet Davranışları

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#### ABSTRACT

Of late years in Turkey, the number of passengers who prefers air transportation has been increasing expeditiously. In that case, understanding the wants, satisfaction levels and complaining behaviors of passengers has been obligatory for airline companies. Therefore in this study, Turkish passengers' complaining behaviors and Turkish-oriented airlines' service recovery efforts toward those complaints have been searched. The study results indicated that most of the passengers have experienced a service failure and complain. Turkish passengers mostly complain about physical evidence, employee behaviour, airline's attitudes and make their complaints face to face to the airline employees. If they satisfy with the airlines' service recovery efforts, they are willing to recommend the airline and fly again with the same airline. In addition, the education level of passengers has been found as an important variable effecting their complaint behavior and satisfaction level with the airlines' service recovery efforts.

**Keywords:** Customer Complaints, Passenger, Airline Company

#### ÖZET

Son yıllarda Türkiye'de, havayolu taşımacılığını tercih eden yolcuların sayısı hızlı bir şekilde artmaktadır. Bu durumda, yolcuların isteklerini, memnuniyet düzeylerini ve şikayet davranışlarını anlamak, havayolu işletmeleri için zorunlu olmaktadır. Bu nedenle bu çalışmada, Türk yolcuların şikayet davranışları ve Türk menşeli havayolu işletmelerinin bu şikayetlerin çözümüne yönelik çabaları araştırılmıştır. Çalışma sonuçları göstermiştir ki, yolcuların çoğunluğu bir hizmet hatasıyla karşılaşmış ve şikayette bulunmuştur. Türk yolcular çoğunlukla fiziksel unsurlar, çalışanların davranışları ve havayollarının şikayetlere yönelik tutumları konusunda şikayet etmekte ve havayolu çalışanlarına yüz yüze şikayette bulunmaktadır. Yolcular, eğer havayolu işletmesinin sorunun çözümüne yönelik çabalarından memnun kalırlarsa, aynı havayolu ile tekrar uçuşa ve bu havayolunu diğerlerine tavsiye etme konusunda istekli olmaktadır. Ayrıca, yolcuların eğitim düzeyi, yolcuların şikayet davranışını ve havayolu işletmesinin sorunun çözümüne yönelik çabalarından memnuniyetini etkileyen önemli bir değişken olarak bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Müşteri Şikayetleri, Yolcu, Havayolu İşletmesi

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## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, according to IATA reports (2013 July) travelling with airlines in the world has increased % 5.1. Airline's international traffic and passenger demand have ascended % 3.7 with European airlines, % 7.8 with Neareast airlines, % 7.5 with African airlines, % 7.3 with Latin Amearican airlines and % 6.3 with Asia pacific airlines compared to July 2012. But, the development rate of aviation industry in Turkey has changed faster than the rate of the world aviation industry. Considering to Turkish General Directorate of State Airports Authority's statistics; total number of passengers using air transportation has become about 82 million (% 13.4 changed rate) till the end of July in Turkey (<http://www.dhmi.gov.tr/istatistik.aspx>, 2013). So it can be said that the number of people using airlines has been enhancing gradually each year in Turkey.

The above mentioned statistics show that in the airline industry of Turkey, understanding and solving customer complaints have become vital because of fierce competition. According to TARP estimates (1986), half of customers that meet with a service failure will switch company despite they are satisfied with recovery of complaints (Estelami,1999). In addition they have found that customers who are dissatisfied will tell approximately nine or ten people about their bad experience related to goods or services (Lam & Tang, 2003). According to US Office of consumer affairs, potential costs of giving bad service are more than 100 \$ per each complaint (Haverila and Naumann, 2010).

But, if customers don't say their bad purchase experience, companies will be unaware of their problems (Taleghani et.al., 2011). According to researches, only 10 % of dissatisfied customers complain to (Atalık, 2007). The reasons of that customers do not complain (Odabaşı, 2010);

- to complain is not worthwhile,
- to not believe anything would be done about problem and
- to not know where and how to complain.

Therefore, companies should build up a complaint culture to improve their services (Potluri and Mangnale, 2011). Hence, customer complaint may be a very important source of information for enterprises (Tse and Wilton, 1988; Cho et.al., 2002) and customer feedback. Customer complaint also can be used to develop the product or services (Haverila and Naumann, 2010). Some researches put forward that there is a negative and significant correlation between customer complaints and customer satisfaction and when customer complaints decrease, the customer loyalty increases (Hamidizadeh et.al., 2011; Türkyılmaz and Coşkun, 2005; Larivet and Brouard, 2010). Also, solution of customer complaints may increase positive word of mouth (Blodget and Anderson, 2000; Pranic and Roehl, 2012). Briefly, customer complaints may have significant impact on satisfaction and loyalty intentions of customers (Schoefer and Ennew, 2004).

Generally, the academic studies of customer complaints focus on complaint type and reason, notifications of complaints, satisfaction / dissatisfaction, demographic profiles of customers (Tolon and Zengin, 2011; Gökdeniz et.al., 2011; Sarıdaldı and Sevim, 2009; Lam and Tang, 2003; Kim and Lee, 2009; Unur et.al., 2010; Atalık, 2007). But in Turkey, there are a few studies including complaint behavior of airline passengers. So in this study, Turkish airline passengers' complaint topics they faced during their flight, their notifications and evaluations of airline response to service failure considering their demographic characteristics have been analyzed.

## 1. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1. Customer Complaints

One of the purposes of marketing activities realized by enterprises is to create loyal customers (Atalık, 2007). Generally, gaining a new customer can be five times more expensive than keeping existing customer. Communication with existing customers may easier and their tendency to purchase may be higher than new customers (Estelami,1999). Especially in service industry, a few companies have ability “get it right first time” (Potluri and Mangnale, 2011). In other words, it is quite difficult to apply zero defect for each service process in service company (Astuti and Dharmmesta, 2011). So there is positive relationship between service failures that customer encounter and probability of customer complaints (Chang et.al., 2012).

As Fornell and Westbrook (1979) define, “complaining is a means of making one's feelings known when unfair seller practices are encountered, when disappointment with a product arises”. According to Kılıç and Ok (2012) complaint refers to “the situation which occurs when purchased good or service doesn't meet the expectations or encountering with unexpected situations during consumption.

Individual customer characteristics, customer's perceptions about source of dissatisfaction, outcome expectancies, product type, and complaining's cost may affect for customer complaints (Cho et.al., 2002). Some of reasons for customer complaints are scheduling, slow service, pricing, employee behavior, poor communications (Estelami, 1999; Larivet and Brouard, 2010).

Customers who are not satisfied may express via direct or indirect methods their ideas in connection with negative experience (Kim and Boo, 2011). There are different types of complainers. According to Singh (1988), complaint behaviour as a result of dissatisfaction can be manifested in three negative forms: voiced complaints, negative word-of-mouth and legal actions. Other customer complaint behaviours are passives, voicer, irates and activist (Singh, 1990; Tolon and Zengin, 2011). In addition, Rogers et.al. (1992) classified customer complaint behaviour like; do nothing, change future behavior, private complaining, voice complaint, and complaint to third party. No matter what kind of behavior, complaints resolution and effective communication is very important in order to ensure satisfaction and loyalty (Karatepe, 2006; Miller, 2011). But

in recent years, development of internet technology has changed reaction of dissatisfied customers (Winch, 2011). Today customers who are dissatisfied about goods or services may express suggestion or complaint loudly and often through social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), online feedback form or online complaint forum (Dunn and Dahl, 2012). Customers who are complainer wants the employees not to give negative nonverbal signals, to have enough knowledge about goods or services and to be empowered to handle their complaints. According to Gruber et.al (2006), customers think that if employees take them seriously, this will lead to a problem solution and feelings of satisfaction.

Customer complaint is not only load the dice against but also provide advantages to the company. Solution of customer complaint is may not only protect company trademark (Tolon and Zengin, 2011) and market share, but may also increase company's profit (Estelami, 1999). In addition, customers who are satisfied with resolution of complaints process are 8% more loyal than other customers who have never experienced any problems (Goodman, 1999; Lee and Hu, 2004). Also, understanding customer complaints is important for CRM (Dunn and Dahl, 2012). CRM can helps to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty through service recovery (Rothenberger et.al., 2008). Moreover, customer complaints may help to identify the weak points of the product or service and improve goods' or services' quality, get wise to market trends, increase cross selling, positive communication with customer, positive image and attitude (Gökdeniz et.al., 2011), prevent the negative word of mouth communication and customer loss (Tolon and Zengin, 2011).

According to Tolon and Zengin (2011) demographic characteristics play an important role in determining complaint behavior differences between customers. As identified by Kim and Boo (2011), the most influential factor causing customers to actually voice a complaint was attitude towards complaining, followed by prior complaining experience and brand image. Bell and Luddington (2006) researched that the relationship between customer complaints and service personnel commitment to customer service and found that customer complaints are significantly and negatively associated with service personnel commitment to customer service. Revitalize customer loyalty after a service failure and recovery relies principally on the recovery of customer trust (La and Choi, 2012). Gökdeniz et.al. (2011) has found that there is a meaningful relationship between satisfaction from complaint process and repurchase intention and there is negative correlation between complaint satisfaction and negative word of mouth.

In the literature, Sarıdaldı and Sevim (2009), has evaluated the customer complaint management performance from the customer's point of view and to implemented them within TCDD. Analysis showed that most of the respondents didn't make a complaint and they didn't satisfy with the resolution of complaint handling. In addition, customers who are not satisfied were refunded the ticket price or apologized by TCDD. Lam and Tang (2003) have identified the likelihood of various customer complaint behaviors occurring in Hong Kong hotel restaurants, and to assessed the relationship between these behaviors and the complainers' demographic characteristics. Analysis

showed that the more vocal and active complainers tended to be younger, high educated and earn high money.

As Tolon and Zengin (2011) researched that to determine the relationship between customer complaint behavior and demographical characteristics in Turkey and found that older and better educated Turkish customers are more likely to complaint behavior. But there is no significant correlation between income level and gender.

## 1.2. Customer Complaints in Aviation Industry

Some errors may occur during the service delivery. One of them is airline services. This errors may take its source from airline company, passenger or both of them (Chen et.al., 2012). Passenger complaints are usually caused by service failures.

According to Forbes (2008b) “customer complaints measure consumers’ dissatisfaction with the quality of a product or service”. Airline companies can deliver high-quality service, depends on being customer-focused.

The Airline Quality Rating identified customer-oriented areas in airline industry like as; on-time performance, involuntary denied boarding, mishandled baggage and passenger complaints (Wattanacharoensil and Yoopetch, 2012). Passenger service quality defined that flight delays, mishandled baggage, oversale and customer complaint handling by US Department of Transportation (2013). Thus, it can be said that impact of service quality on customer complaints. Moreover, service quality perceptions are likely to be key drivers of customer loyalty (Rothenberger et.al., 2008). In the literature, this relationship was investigated by different researcher. For example, Srinivasan et.al. (2002) has found that on-time performance, mishandled baggage and oversales are negative affect on customer satisfaction. The effects of actual and expected quality on passenger complaints in USA airline industry has searched and results showed that there are fewer complaints when the actual quality of service is higher. In addition, higher expected quality leads to more complaints especially when the quality is worse than expected (Januszewski, 2004). In airline industry, satisfaction with complaint handling was key to consumer recommendation of the service to others (Rothenberger et.al., 2008) and then the relationship between and airline profitability (Steven et.al., 2012). So airline managers should listen patiently and carefully to the complaints of customers and respond quickly to these concerns (Atalık, 2007). According to air travel consumer report (Table 1) in USA, most of passenger complaints are as follows:

As indicated in table 1, in USA, flight problems are the most complaint area. Because passenger trip time (include delays, cancellations, misconnections) is an important property of the air transportation system and has been positively correlated with customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Sherry and Wang, 2007). Flight problems are undesired situation for both airline company and passenger. Forbes (2008a) has found that prices fall by \$1.42 on average for each additional minute of flight delay. The anaysis identified that level of delay and average yield affect passenger complaints (Britto et.al., 2012; Bhadra, 2009). In addition competition is correlated with better

airlines' on-time performance (Mazzeo, 2003). Dresner and Xu (1995) found that increasing customer service raises customer satisfaction and improves corporate performance in airline industry. Research on the performance of major airlines suggests that there is a positive correlation between on-time performance and operating profit (Dresner and Xu, 1995; Suzuki, 1998; Booz: Allen&Hamilton, 2001).

**Table 1: Air Traveler Consumer Report, Complaint Categories in USA.**

Ranking	Complaint Category	Complaints
1	Flight problems (Delays, Cancellations, Misconnections)	279
2	Baggage	162
3	Customer service	159
4	Reservation / Ticketing / Boarding	152
5	Refunds	68
6	Disability	51
7	Fares	36
8	Other (Frequent flyer)	31
9	Oversales	22
10	Advertising	7
11	Discrimination	5
12	Animals	1

**Source:** U.S. Department of Transportation (July, 2013)

Behn and Riley (1999) measured the timely nonfinancial performance information is a useful predictor of financial performance in the airline industry. Analysis showed that on-time performance, revenues and load factor is negatively associated with passenger complaints. In contrast, increases in mishandled baggage, deteriorating in-flight service, and being involuntary 'bumped' increases customer complaints. Furthermore, passenger complaints are negative effect on airline profitability (Atalık, 2007; Behn and Riley, 1999). So, passenger complaints may decrease demand to airline services (Atalık, 2007; Britto et.al., 2012).

Kim and Lee (2009) conducted that a cross-cultural (South Korea, Japan, China, and America) differences in passenger complaints regarding irregular airline conditions – IAC – (severe weather patterns, unexpected aircraft problems or airport failures can mitigate against punctuality). Analysis results showed that passengers from four countries have different complaint behaviors regarding IACs, and that the complaint behavior of passengers was also affected by demographic factors including age, education and previous experience.

Unur et.al., (2010) points out that package tours complaints and frequencies of these complaints in Turkey and the result showed that travel agencies receive complaints mostly on agents' executives, employee behaviors and price of tour packages.

Atalık (2007) made a research to identify common complaints made by Turkish frequent flyers related to their program membership. The results demonstrated that the Elite members of the Miles&Miles program of THY, the common complaints of members fall into five categories. The main concerns are related to the availability of free tickets and upgrades of the flight class, the behaviour of personnel, card ownership issues, level and type of priority services offered within the program and the lack of alliances with other airlines.

It can be seen that the studies including passenger complaint in Turkey are relatively low in aviation literature. Thus in this study, Turkish passengers' complaint behavior were searched relying on the above mentioned importance of this topic. So following hypotheses were developed to understand the relationship among various variables searched in this study:

H1: There is a significant relationship between the passengers' complaint behavior and their gender.

H2: There is a significant relationship between the passengers' level of satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts and their gender.

H3: There is a significant relationship between the passengers' complaint behavior and their age.

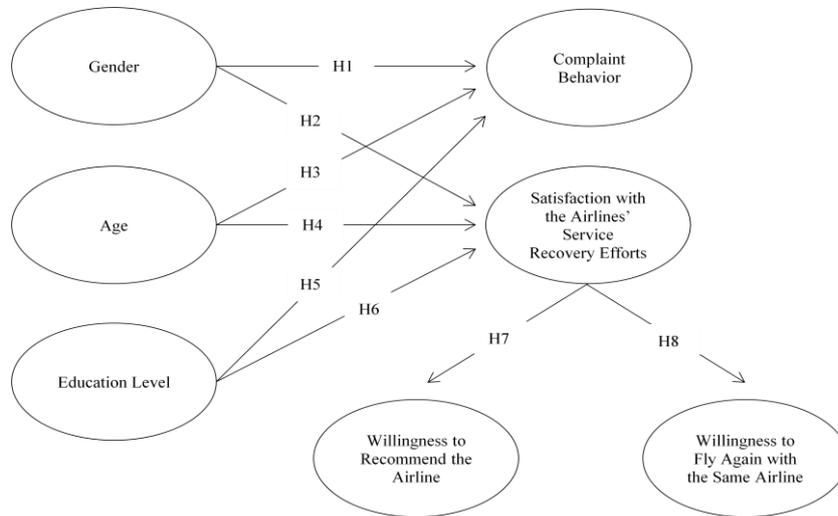
H4: There is a significant relationship between the passengers' level of satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts and their age.

H5: There is a significant relationship between the passengers' complaint behavior and their education level.

H6: There is a significant relationship between the passengers' level of satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts and their education level.

H7: There is a significant relationship between respondents' satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts and their willingness to recommend the airline.

H8: There is a significant relationship between respondents' satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts and their willingness to fly again with the same airline.



**Figure 1: Research Model**

## 2. Research methodology

### 2.1. Measures of Constructs

The survey questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section was designed to obtain each respondent's complaints toward airline's services. Customer complaints were measured using the scale developed by Alper (2010). The new scale consisted of 14 items. Some questions were asked as including "Yes/No" options and the other questions were asked as multiple-choice questions. The second section included respondents' demographic information as gender, age, education level and number of flight. Survey questionnaire was implemented in Turkish language.

### 2.2. Data Collection and Sample Design

A self-administered questionnaire survey was conducted at different airports in Turkey during January and February 2012. This study adopted the convenience sampling approach due to an unknown population of Turkish air passengers. Passengers waiting in both the domestic and international lines' areas of airports were invited to participate in the survey and assured of confidentiality in reporting before a questionnaire was delivered. 400 questionnaires were distributed and 300 valid data were obtained after excluding the incomplete ones, yielding a 75.0 percent response rate.

As can be seen from Table 2, respondents' profile involved that 50% of the respondents were male and 50 % were female by having even share. The great majority of the respondents was aged between 25 and 45 years old (77.6 %) and had a university and

higher educational degree (53 %). Generally, respondents flew 4 to 7 times (40.3%) with the last used Turkish airline company.

**Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Gender	N	%	Education Level	N	%
Female	150	50	Primary School	18	6.0
Male	150	50	High School	123	41.0
<b>Age</b>			University	124	41.3
18 – 24	44	14.7	Masters or Doctorate	35	11.7
25 – 35	124	41.3	<b>Total Number of Flight with the last used airline</b>		
36 – 45	109	36.3	1-3 time	85	28.3
46 – 55	18	6.0	4-7 time	121	40.3
56 and above	5	1.7	8-10 time	67	22.3
			11 and above	27	9.0

### 2.3. Data analysis

Cross tabulation was used to determine if associations exist between various variables. The Pearson's Chi-square statistic was used to determine whether values calculated for the cross-tabulations were statistically significant. Frequencies were also computed to analyze the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

## 3. RESULTS

As shown in Table 3, two hundred seventy-nine respondents (93 %) indicated that they had experienced a service failure with a domestic airline. It was found that not all of those dissatisfied passengers complained (77.1 % complained), 22.9 percent of them did not complain. They didn't complain because most of them didn't believe anything would be done about their problem (76.6 %) or they didn't know where and how to complain (18.8 %).

**Table 3: Experienced with the Service Failure and Complaining**

	N	%		N	%
<b>Did you have experienced a service failure?</b>		<b>Did you complain?</b>			
Yes	279	93.0	Yes	215	77.1
No	21	7.0	No	64	22.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Why didn't you complain?</b>					
I didn't believe anything would be done about my problem			49	76.6	
I didn't know where to complain			12	18.8	
I was afraid that the company would take some negative action against me			1	1.6	
Other			2	3.1	
<b>Total</b>			<b>64</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Table 4 shows that Turkish airline passengers mostly (24.7 %) complained about physical evidence as aircraft, comfort, food and beverage, scent, heat, moisture, in-flight entertainment facilities/programmes. Other mainly complaint topics were about employee behaviour and airline's attitude (23.6 %), baggage (15 %), flight problems (14 %) as flight schedule, arrival and departure time, flight network, delays, cancellations, misconnections, check-in, (9.6 %) fares and campaign, (8.9 %) online reservation system and airline websites.

**Table 4: Airline Passengers' Complaints**

	N	%
Physical Evidence	69	24.7
Employee Behaviour and Airline's Attitude	66	23.6
Baggage	42	15.0
Flight Problems	39	14.0
Fares and Campaign	27	9.6
Online Reservation System and Airline Websites	25	8.9
Refunds	6	2.1
Safety and Security	4	1.5
Other	1	0.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Passengers primarily make their complaint face to face (37.5 %). Second mostly used channel is via e-mail or internet. Then they write letter (17.6) and use telephone (8.3) and other channels (1.8) to make their complaint. They mainly contacted with airline employees (57.7 %) and customer service (34.4 %).

The majority of respondents indicated that the airline did nothing to rectify the service failure (39.6 %). This result is coherent with the previous studies of Mostert and others (2009). Furthermore 32.6 % of the respondents stated that the airline apologized and explained for the failure. Only small number of respondents (7.9 %) conveyed that airline solved the failure.

In order to determine whether a statistically significant association exists between variables, Chi-square analysis was performed. As can be seen in Table 5, there is a significant relationship between the passengers' complaint behavior and their age [ $\chi^2$  (df=2, n=280): 1.091; p: 0.005]. So hypothesis 3 was supported. Since there were a few respondents in some age groups, the original five groups (Age 24 or below, 25 – 34, 35 – 44, 45 – 54, and 55 or above) were recoded into three that included "Young Respondents" (24 or below), "Middle Age Respondents" (25 – 44) and "Senior Respondents" (45 or above). The results showed that the young and middle age groups of customers were more inclined to complain than the senior age group. This finding is in agreement with the study of Lam and Tang (2008).

**Table 5: Cross Tabulation of Complaint Behavior\*Age**

		Age		
		Young Age (%)	Middle Age (%)	Senior (%)
Complaint behaviour	Yes	10.2	81.5	8.3
	No	29.7	65.6	4.7
$\chi^2$ (df=2, n=280): 1.091; p: 0.005				

Hypothesis 5 that there is a significant relationship between the passengers' complaint behavior and their education level was also tested [ $\chi^2$  (df=2, n=280): 32.550; p: 0.000]. The results indicated that the higher the education level attained by respondents, the more likely they have propensity to complain. Thus, hypothesis 5 was also supported by the results of this study; Keng et al. (1995) obtained similar results in their study. It can be said that highly educated respondents are better informed and aware of the routes by which they can address their complaints. So if their expectations are not met, this leads to a greater likelihood of complaint behavior (Lam and Tang, 2003).

**Table 6: Cross Tabulation of Complaint Behavior\*Education Level**

		Education Level			
		Primary School (%)	High School (%)	University (%)	Masters and Doctorate (%)
Complaint behaviour	Yes	3.2	36.1	46.8	13.9
	No	17.2	57.8	25.0	0
$\chi^2$ (df=2, n=280): 32.550; p: 0.000					

Hypothesis 6 was accepted too. It means that there is a significant relationship between the passengers' level of satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts and their education level [ $\chi^2$  (df=2, n=215): 13.803; p: 0.001]. Table 7 shows that as the education level of passengers increases, the level of satisfaction related to airlines' service recovery efforts will be expected to increase. But on the contrary, as the education level of passengers descend, the level of satisfaction related to airlines' service recovery efforts may tend to descend.

**Table 7: Cross Tabulation of Satisfaction\*Education Level**

		Education Level		
		Low Education Level (%)	Middle Education Level (%)	High Education Level (%)
Satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts	Yes	0	25.6	74.4
	No	5.4	43.4	51.2
$\chi^2$ (df=2, n=215): 13.803; p: 0.001				

It was found that there is a significant association between respondents' satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts and their willingness to recommend the airline [ $\chi^2$  (df=2, n=215): 67.738; p: 0.000]. So, hypothesis 7 was supported by the results of this study. It is consistent with Steyn et al.' (2011) study results. From the cross

tabulation (Table 8), it was concluded that 82.6 % of respondents who were satisfied with the airlines' service recovery efforts will be able to recommend the airline to others.

**Table 8: Cross Tabulation of Satisfaction\* Willingness to Recommend the Airline**

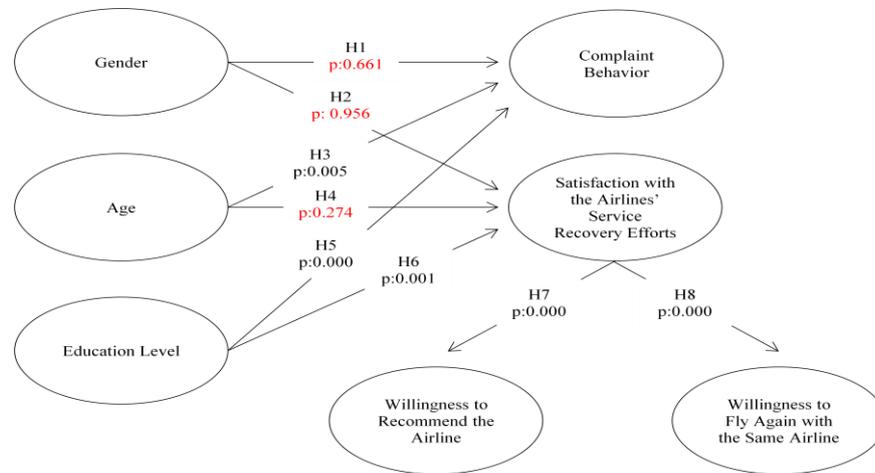
		Willingness to recommend the airline		
		Yes (%)	No (%)	Undecided (%)
Satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts	Yes	82.6	8.1	9.3
	No	25.6	46.5	27.9
$\chi^2$ (df=2, n=215): 67.738; p: 0.000				

Hypothesis 8 that there is a significant relationship between respondents' satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts and their willingness to fly again with the same airline was accepted as well [ $\chi^2$  (df=2, n=215): 48.423; p: 0.000]. According to the results (Table 9), 81.4 % of respondents indicated that they would fly again with the same airline in their next flights.

**Table 9: Cross Tabulation of Satisfaction\*Willingness to Fly Again**

		Willingness to fly again with the same airline		
		Yes (%)	No (%)	Undecided (%)
Satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts	Yes	81.4	10.5	8.1
	No	33.3	46.5	20.2
$\chi^2$ (df=2, n=215): 48.423; p: 0.000				

Hypothesis 1 that there is a significant relationship between the passengers' complaint behavior and their gender wasn't accepted. It means that there is no significant relationship between the passengers' complaint behavior and their gender [ $\chi^2$  (df=1, n=280): 0.193; p: 0.661]. These finding appears to be similar with Lam and Tang (2008), but contradict those studies by Keng et al. (1995), and Slama and Williams (1991). In addition, hypothesis 2 and 4 including there is a significant relationship between the passengers' level of satisfaction with the airlines' service recovery efforts and their gender [ $\chi^2$  (df=1, n=215): 0.003; p: 0.956] and age [ $\chi^2$  (df=2, n=215): 2.588; p: 0.274] were also not supported in the study.



**Figure 2: Final Model**

#### 4. DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

In this study, it was found that most of the passengers had experienced a service failure with a domestic airline (93 %) contrary to Mostert and others' study (2009). In their study, only 21.9 % of passengers indicated that they had experienced a service failure with a domestic airline. The majority of respondents who experienced a service failure with a domestic airline indicated that the airline did nothing to recover from the failure. In addition, the results showed that some of the dissatisfied customers might not complain. They did not complain because most of them believed that complaining would not result in a favorable outcome as found in previous studies (Richins, 1983) and also they believed that complaint procedures are inaccessible (Lam and Tang, 2003).

These results indicate that management should establish effective complaint-handling procedures that include simple and direct connection of customers as social media channels. In addition, it may include such applications as "Customer Hotlines" and "Email Your Suggestions" for customers to register their complaint easily anytime they want to. All employees should express their willingness and sincerity when soliciting customers' complaints, and managers must make sure that each complainant will receive a quick response (Lam and Tang, 2003).

Employees should be trained and empowered to take appropriate actions quickly in order to meet complainants' expectations. Because passengers primarily make their complaints face to face and contact with airline employees. If they meet complainants' expectations in a best manner, it can be possible to turn a dissatisfied customer into a satisfied customer. Otherwise ineffective handling of customers' complaints can increase frustration and dissatisfaction, provoke consumers' negative word-of-mouth

and have harmful effects on organization's business (Yuksel et.al., 2006). Thus airline companies should give importance to effective complaint handling and retain dissatisfied passengers by resolving their complaints in a best way.

In this study, it was found that Turkish airline passengers primarily complained about physical evidence - aircraft, comfort, food and beverage, scent, heat, moisture, in-flight entertainment facilities/programmes. But in previous studies the majority of respondents attributed flight problems (delayed flight, flight cancellations, diversion of flight) as the most important service failure they experienced (Mostert et.al., 2009; Bamford and Xystouri, 2005). In addition, according to "Air Travel Consumer Report made by U.S.Department of Transportation" flight delays were also seen as the most encountered complaint type (2013). According to our results, it can be said that Turkish passengers give more importance to physical evidence as aircraft type, whether it is new or not. Recently, consistent with our results, many Turkish airline firms have been ordered new aircrafts to renew their fleet. Additionally, our country's flag carrier company, Turkish airlines, have worked to find their own scent to use in the aircraft and in the offices and found their own scent. Another service implementation of the same airline is "flying chef" in-flight. They cook and serve fresh meals to the passengers during the flight to increase passengers' satisfaction.

Management should pay particular attention to the better-educated passengers, because they are more likely to complain and have low satisfaction level with the airlines' service recovery efforts. They have more knowledge about their rights and better education might provide them higher self-confidence, so airline management should understand their needs and respond instantly to their complaints.

As a final say, the airline companies should try to provide an excellent service to their passengers by considering many variables. If the passengers meet a service failure, it should be recovered immediately and in an effective way. Otherwise it will be very difficult for the airline companies to survive in the long run and continue to their businesses in such a tough rivalry environment.

## **5. LIMITATIONS and FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although this study contributes to airline marketing literature, it has some limitations. In this study, the survey was only administered to Turkish passengers with limited numbers using local-oriented airlines. These passengers might have different complaint behaviors than the other passenger groups using foreign-oriented airlines. Therefore conducting a survey including not only Turkish passengers but also foreign passengers may be more effective to understand the whole passengers' complaint behavior and provide making a comparison between the cultures.

In addition in this research, a non-probability convenience sampling method was used because of airlines' reluctance to leave off their customer databases. By using this sampling method, conclusions can be drawn only from the respondents who participated in the study and not from the population at large.

As the demographic characteristics of passengers, only – age, gender, education level and number of flight - were included in the study. And it was searched whether there is a significant relationship among some of these demographics and passengers' complaint behavior. Other demographic variables as nationality, average income and flight purpose may be included in the survey to see the relationship between these demographics and passengers' complaint behavior.

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