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TSA Complaints

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For millions of travelers, the TSA checkpoint is the gateway to their journey—an experience that can either be smooth and efficient or frustrating and stressful. TSA executives and operational stakeholders work tirelessly to refine these processes, ensuring that security remains a top priority while minimizing disruptions for passengers. However, despite these efforts, thousands of complaints are submitted every year, painting a picture of the traveler experience that is often far from ideal. What do these complaints actually tell us? Are they isolated frustrations, or do they reveal patterns that could help improve TSA operations on a national scale?

The analysis uncovered a story within the data—a story of how passenger dissatisfaction fluctuates across airports, complaint categories, and time. By following the data, we can see where challenges are most severe, what factors contribute to high complaint volumes, and how TSA leadership can take action to enhance the traveler experience while maintaining security efficiency.

Imagine a business traveler running late for a flight. As she approaches the TSA checkpoint, she encounters an unexpectedly long line. The wait drags on, tensions rise, and the possibility of missing her flight looms. She finally reaches the front, only to be pulled aside for an additional security screening that feels slow and disorganized. After finally passing through, she arrives at her gate just as the doors close.

To her, this is a personal frustration—a bad morning that derailed her trip. But when we zoom out and look at the national data, we see that her experience is far from unique. Certain airports consistently report higher volumes of complaints, particularly related to screening delays and inconsistent procedures. These complaints are not random; they reveal pain points in TSA operations that impact travelers every day.

Over time, these issues become more than just a personal inconvenience—they shape public perception of TSA efficiency. A pattern emerges: airports that experience higher passenger volume and staffing challenges tend to generate the most complaints. If left unaddressed, these issues can erode trust in airport security operations and create bottlenecks that affect overall airport efficiency.

When examining the data, we see that not all airports are equal when it comes to complaints. Some major hubs experience significantly higher volumes than others. But it's not just about location—timing matters too. Complaints surge during peak travel seasons, particularly around the holidays and summer months. This suggests that staffing shortages and high passenger loads create environments where delays and inconsistencies become more noticeable and frustrating.

A deeper look at complaint categories reveals further insights. Reports related to screening procedures and delays make up a significant portion of the total complaints, suggesting that passengers are often frustrated by inconsistencies in how security protocols are applied. For example, a traveler who breezes through security at one airport may face excessive delays and unclear instructions at another, leading to confusion and dissatisfaction.

These patterns tell us something critical: passenger frustration isn't just about the experience itself—it's about expectations. When expectations are not met or when procedures feel inconsistent, dissatisfaction rises. By identifying the airports and categories with the most complaints, TSA leadership has a clear roadmap for where improvements can have the greatest impact.

Understanding these trends is only the first step. The real challenge is in translating these insights into meaningful action. The data suggests a few key areas for improvement: First, TSA

can enhance staffing strategies to ensure smoother operations during peak travel periods. Many of the highest-complaint airports see surges during these times, indicating that staffing shortages play a key role in passenger frustration. Adjusting workforce allocation to meet seasonal demand could alleviate congestion and reduce complaints related to long wait times.

Second, standardizing screening procedures across airports could greatly improve the passenger experience. One of the biggest frustrations travelers face is inconsistency—what is allowed at one airport may be flagged as an issue at another. Providing uniform training and refining security procedures to ensure consistency across all TSA checkpoints will reduce confusion and help passengers feel more confident about the process.

Finally, improving passenger communication could significantly reduce complaints related to delays and unexpected procedures. Many travelers' express frustration not just with wait times but with the lack of real-time updates about security lines and procedures. Implementing clearer signage, digital wait-time tracking, and better communication from TSA agents can help passengers better prepare and set appropriate expectations. By taking action on these areas, TSA can not only reduce complaint volumes but also enhance the overall airport experience. Passengers will feel more informed, security procedures will feel more seamless, and trust in TSA operations will strengthen.

Complaints are not just numbers; they are signals. They highlight the friction points in TSA operations and provide an opportunity for improvement. By addressing key issues—particularly in high-complaint airports and categories—TSA leadership can create a more efficient, consistent, and traveler-friendly security process.

Every traveler wants a smooth start to their journey. With the right improvements in place, TSA has the opportunity to make that a reality for millions of passengers each year.

