



COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN HANDLING INDIHOME CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS AT THE TELKOM STO SUKARAMAI OFFICE

Astika Nisa Alfifa¹, Nursapia Harahap²

^{1,2}Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: astika0603221037@uinsu.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the communication strategies of service officers in handling IndiHome customer complaints at the Telkom STO Sukaramai Office and its impact on customer satisfaction. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through interviews and observations. Data analysis was carried out through reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions, with triangulation techniques for validity. The results showed that communication was carried out interpersonally through direct interaction and digital media such as telephone and WhatsApp. Although officers have demonstrated a professional attitude and provided education to customers, communication effectiveness is still not optimal, especially in terms of message clarity and empathetic approach. In addition, service quality has not been consistent in terms of responsiveness and reliability. This condition causes the level of customer satisfaction to be in the fairly satisfied category. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the integration between communication strategies and service quality to improve customer satisfaction.

Keywords: communication strategy, complaint handling, service quality, customer satisfaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

Communication in customer service plays a strategic role because it is the primary means for companies to build understanding, respond to needs, and maintain relationships with customers. In the context of telecommunications services, communication serves not only as a process for conveying information but also as a mechanism for managing complaints, alleviating dissatisfaction, and rebuilding customer trust. A communication strategy is necessary to ensure that messages delivered by service personnel are received clearly, accurately, and tailored to the customer's circumstances. Effendy (2011) explains that a communication strategy encompasses planning and managing messages to achieve the desired communication effect. Similarly, Pakaya et al. (2022) emphasize that the effectiveness of a communication strategy is influenced by the

credibility of the communicator, the characteristics of the message, and the media used. Therefore, in customer service, a communication strategy is a crucial factor in determining a company's success in handling complaints professionally and empathetically.

In the telecommunications industry, customer complaints are unavoidable because internet services are highly dependent on network stability, device quality, technical response, and speed of problem resolution. Customers experiencing connection disruptions, delayed repairs, or unclear information are likely to complain as a way of expressing dissatisfaction with the service they receive. Complaints not only indicate service failures but can also be a valuable source of information for companies to improve service quality. Pell (2025) explains that complaints are a form of expression of a disruptive situation and are conveyed to another party in the hope of receiving attention or a resolution. From a service perspective, Hermawati (2023) emphasizes that complaint handling is a complex process because it requires companies to provide a quick, fair, clear, and solution-oriented response. Therefore, customer complaints need to be understood as a communication channel between the company and customers to improve the service experience.

IndiHome, one of PT Telkom Indonesia's home internet services, faces significant challenges in maintaining the quality of service communications, particularly when customers experience network disruptions or other technical issues. At the operational level, service personnel represent the company and interact directly with customers, both through face-to-face communication and digital media such as telephone and WhatsApp. In complaint situations, successful handling is determined not only by technical ability to resolve the issue, but also by how officers explain the problem, provide reassurance, manage customer emotions, and provide solutions. Istanbulluoglu and Sakman (2024) state that successful complaint handling can strengthen customer trust in a company and increase the likelihood of customers continuing to use the service. This demonstrates that communication between service personnel plays a crucial role in maintaining customer perceptions of IndiHome's service quality.

Service quality in complaint handling can also be understood through the SERVQUAL perspective, which emphasizes five key dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. In the context of IndiHome's complaint handling, responsiveness relates to the speed with which officers respond to customer reports; reliability relates to the reliability of problem resolution; assurance relates to the officers' ability to instill trust; and empathy relates to personal attention to the customer's situation. Kusaeni and Hidayat (2022) emphasized that service quality influences customer satisfaction, complaints, engagement, and loyalty to internet services. Meanwhile, Mofokeng (2025) places service quality as a crucial factor in building customer satisfaction. Therefore, communication strategies in complaint handling need to be combined with consistent service quality so that customers not only receive technical solutions but also experience clear, responsive, and humane communication.

Several previous studies have discussed IndiHome's communication and service, but most have focused on marketing communications, public relations, or the service complaint system. Agung et al. (2022), for example, examined IndiHome's marketing communication strategy to increase customer base during the pandemic. Latif (2023) examined public relations strategies for achieving excellent service for Telkom Indonesia

customers. Meanwhile, Muhammad Ridho (2025) focused on analyzing the implementation of IndiHome's customer service complaint system. These studies provide important contributions, but they have not specifically examined how service staff communication strategies operate during direct interactions with customers when complaints arise. This gap in this research lies in the analysis of operational communication by service staff in handling customer complaints, specifically from the perspectives of communicator, message, medium, response, empathy, and customer experience.

Based on these descriptions, this study is crucial for analyzing communication strategies in handling IndiHome customer complaints at the Telkom STO Sukaramai Office. The novelty of this research lies in its focus, which not only views complaints as technical or administrative issues but also as a service communication process involving interactions between staff and customers. This study attempts to explain how service personnel establish communication, convey information, use communication media, and respond to customers experiencing service disruptions. Academically, this research is expected to enrich the study of customer service communication, particularly in the telecommunications sector. Practically, the results of this study are expected to provide input for Telkom STO Sukaramai in strengthening a clearer, more responsive, empathetic, and consistent communication strategy, thereby enhancing customer trust and service experience.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to gain a deeper understanding of the communication strategies of service staff in handling IndiHome customer complaints at the Telkom STO Sukaramai Office. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study is not oriented towards statistical measurement, but rather focuses on understanding the experiences, communication processes, and service interactions between staff and customers in complaint situations. According to Sugiyono (2023), qualitative research is used to examine objects in natural settings, with the researcher as the primary instrument, data collection triangulation, and research results emphasizing meaning rather than generalization. The research location is at the Telkom STO Sukaramai Office, Jl. HM. Joni No. 64, Teladan Timur, Medan Kota District, Medan City, North Sumatra. The research focuses on service communication practices in handling customer complaints, particularly those related to internet network disruptions, information clarity, response speed, and the delivery of solutions to customers.

The research informants were determined purposively, based on their direct involvement in the IndiHome customer complaint handling process. The informants consisted of five individuals: one Head of Service Area, one field coordinator, one field technician, and two IndiHome customers who had filed service complaints. Internal informants were defined as officers who had a role in receiving, coordinating, or resolving customer complaints, while customer informants were defined as IndiHome users who had experienced service disruptions and interacted directly with Telkom STO Sukaramai officers. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Interviews lasted approximately 30–60 minutes for each informant, depending on the depth of information and experience shared. Observations

were conducted to examine the service process, officer communication patterns, use of communication media such as telephone and WhatsApp, and follow-up mechanisms through the service ticket system. Documentation was used to supplement field data through research notes, interview recordings, and relevant supporting documents. The use of interviews, observation, and documentation was intended to enrich the data obtained, provide a more contextualized and comprehensive picture of the service communication phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data presentation, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). In the data condensation stage, interview results were transcribed, reread, and then coded based on key themes, such as communicator strategy, message clarity, communication media, responsiveness, empathy, service reliability, and customer experience. In the data presentation stage, these codes were grouped into thematic categories to systematically analyze the relationship between communication strategy, service quality, and customer experience. Data validity was maintained through source and technical triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from service officers, coordinators, technicians, and customers to identify any congruence or discrepancies in perceptions regarding complaint handling. Meanwhile, technical triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. In this way, research findings were not based solely on one party's statement but were verified through various sources and techniques, thus making the research results more valid, credible, and scientifically accountable.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Communication Strategy in Handling IndiHome Customer Complaints

The communication strategy for handling IndiHome customer complaints at the Telkom STO Sukaramai Office demonstrates that service communication is not only understood as the process of conveying technical information, but also as an effort to build relationships, manage customer emotions, and foster trust in the company's services. Based on research findings, service officers act as the primary communicators, connecting customers with the complaint resolution system, both through direct interactions and digital media. This aligns with Effendy's (2011) view that communication strategies are not solely oriented toward message delivery but also encompass planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of messages to achieve the desired effect. In the context of customer complaints, the desired communication effect is not only the delivery of information but also the emergence of a sense of understanding, service, and reassurance that the customer's complaint is being taken seriously. These findings demonstrate that IndiHome officers' communication strategy straddles the critical juncture between technical resolution and customer experience management.

From a communicator perspective, Telkom STO Sukaramai service officers strive to display a professional demeanor through initial greetings, complaint confirmation, and explanations before taking technical action. These practices demonstrate the interpersonal communication that forms the basis for building rapport between officers

and customers. In communication strategy theory, the credibility of the communicator is a crucial element because customers tend to be more receptive to information when delivered by an officer who is perceived as competent, calm, and able to provide reassurance (Pakaya et al., 2022). However, research also shows that officer professionalism is not always accompanied by consistent empathetic communication skills. This means that officers may follow service procedures, but in some situations are unable to fully adapt their communication style to the emotional state of customers experiencing service disruptions. This is crucial because customers filing complaints typically require not only technical solutions but also acknowledgement of the inconvenience they are experiencing.

From a messaging perspective, officer communication strategies are evident through efforts to provide information about the cause of the disruption, the handling process, and possible solutions. Ideally, service messages should be delivered simply, clearly, step-by-step, and easily understood by customers. However, research findings indicate differences in customer perceptions regarding the clarity of officers' messages. One customer stated, "The explanation was actually quite clear, but there were some parts I didn't understand because it was explained a bit too quickly." This quote demonstrates that communication issues lie not only in the availability of information, but also in the manner in which it is delivered. Interpretatively, messages that are too fast, too technical, or not tailored to the customer's level of understanding can create a communication gap. From a service communication perspective, effective messages should reduce customer uncertainty, not increase confusion. Therefore, message clarity is a crucial aspect of a complaint handling communication strategy because customers need information that is not only technically correct but also psychologically accessible.

From a communication media perspective, research shows that IndiHome customer complaints are handled through face-to-face interactions, telephone, and WhatsApp. The use of digital media demonstrates the service's adaptation to customer needs, who desire a fast and flexible response. A field technician explained, "It's from WhatsApp. For example, they provide a contact person or contact number for reporting. We're between the two. If WhatsApp isn't available, we can use the call center, or a regular phone number. Or, if WhatsApp is available, we'll chat with the customer and schedule an appointment. We'll discuss when they're available to visit for repairs." This quote demonstrates that WhatsApp and telephone are used not only as communication channels but also for coordinating times, confirming locations, and arranging technician visits. This finding aligns with the views of Basten et al. (2024) stated that an effective communication strategy must consider the appropriateness between the communicator, message, media, communication target, and the desired effect. Therefore, selecting digital media for handling complaints can accelerate coordination, but still needs to be balanced with clear information and certainty of follow-up.

In addition to external communication with customers, the communication strategy also takes place internally through coordination between staff. The field coordinator stated, "We monitor every technician activity, visit, and progress on site from our activation group." This statement indicates that complaint handling is not done individually, but through an internal communication system that allows for monitoring of service progress. Analytical, the existence of a coordination group and a service ticket system demonstrates that Telkom STO Sukaramai's communication strategy has a

managerial dimension, ensuring that every complaint is recorded, forwarded, monitored, and resolved. However, the effectiveness of this internal system must still be measured by the customer experience. If internal coordination is good but customers do not receive clear progress information, the communication strategy is not fully effective. This emphasizes that successful service communication depends not only on smooth communication between staff but also on transparency of information to customers, as those directly affected by service disruptions.

From a SERVQUAL perspective, the communication strategy for handling IndiHome customer complaints is closely related to the dimensions of responsiveness, reliability, assurance, and empathy. Responsiveness is reflected in the speed with which staff receive and follow up on customer reports; reliability is reflected in the technician's ability to resolve disruptions promptly; Assurance is reflected in the staff's ability to convey trust through convincing explanations; while empathy reflects the staff's attention to the customer's condition and feelings. Kusaeni et al. (2022) explain that service quality influences customer satisfaction, complaints, engagement, and loyalty in internet services. In this study, the main obstacle was the inconsistency of responses and empathetic approaches. This means that some customers perceived the service as quite good, while others experienced delayed responses or received less detailed explanations. Interpretatively, this inconsistency indicates that the communication strategy has not yet fully established a stable service culture, but rather depends on the situation, staff, and individual communication patterns.

Thus, the communication strategy for handling IndiHome customer complaints at Telkom STO Sukaramai can be understood as a process encompassing interpersonal communication, the use of digital media, internal coordination, and the provision of technical solutions. However, research findings indicate that this strategy still needs to be strengthened in terms of message clarity, response speed, consistent follow-up, and staff empathy. Istanbuluoglu and Sakman (2024) emphasized that successful complaint handling can increase customer trust and encourage service reuse intentions. Therefore, complaint handling should not be viewed solely as a solution to network disruptions, but as a catalyst for improving the company's relationship with customers. If staff are able to convey information clearly, respond quickly to customers, demonstrate concern, and provide assurance of a resolution, then this communication strategy will directly contribute to increased customer trust and positive experiences with IndiHome services.

Telkom STO Sukaramai Office Service Quality (SERVQUAL)

The service quality of the Telkom STO Sukaramai Office in handling IndiHome customer complaints can be analyzed using the SERVQUAL approach, which emphasizes five main dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. These five dimensions are important because customer complaint handling is not only related to resolving technical issues, but also to how customers perceive the clarity of information, speed of response, certainty of service, and personal attention from staff. In the context of internet services, service quality is a crucial factor because customers rely heavily on network stability to support work, education, communication, and entertainment activities. Kusaeni and Hidayat (2022) explain that service quality influences customer satisfaction, complaints, engagement, and loyalty to internet service

providers. Therefore, Telkom STO Sukaramai service quality needs to be understood as the result of an integration between staff technical skills and the quality of communication provided to customers.

In the tangibles dimension, service quality is evident in the availability of physical facilities, technical equipment, service systems, and the appearance of staff in carrying out their duties. Based on the research results, Telkom STO Sukaramai has installed supporting service equipment such as modems, cables, an app-based ticketing system, and staff who work according to operational standards. This dimension is important because physical evidence of service can shape customers' initial impressions of the company's professionalism. However, interpretively, the tangible aspect is not simply the availability of facilities; it also reflects the extent to which these facilities truly support customers' ease of access to services. If technical facilities are available but communication with customers is slow or unclear, then service quality cannot be considered optimal. Therefore, the tangible dimension must be linked to the effectiveness of the service system as directly experienced by customers, not solely to the availability of physical equipment or technical facilities.

In terms of reliability, service quality is reflected in Telkom STO Sukaramai's ability to provide reliable service, particularly in recording, monitoring, and resolving customer complaints. The research findings indicate that the company has utilized a service ticketing system and internal coordination to ensure every customer report is actionable. This is reinforced by the statement of the field coordinator, who explained, "We monitor every technician activity, visit, and progress on site from our activation group." This quote demonstrates that the complaint handling process does not occur spontaneously, but rather through a structured internal monitoring mechanism. Analytically, this monitoring system reflects efforts to build service reliability. However, reliability is only truly perceived by customers if the internal process results in consistent, timely resolutions, and clear communication. Hermawati (2023) emphasized that complaint handling is a complex process because it requires systematic procedures to ensure complaints are resolved effectively and prevent the same errors from recurring.

In the responsiveness dimension, service quality relates to the speed and responsiveness of staff in responding to customer complaints. Research findings indicate that staff use digital media such as WhatsApp and telephone to expedite communication with customers. A field technician explained, "It's through WhatsApp. For example, they provide a contact person or reporting contact number. We can use both, if WhatsApp isn't available, through the call center, or through a regular phone number. Or, if WhatsApp is available, we'll chat with the customer and schedule an appointment. We'll ask them when they're willing to visit for repairs." This quote demonstrates that digital media serves as a means of rapid response, schedule confirmation, and technical coordination before the visit. However, responsiveness is not only measured by the availability of communication channels, but also by the consistency of the speed with which staff respond to complaints. If customers still experience delayed responses at certain times, then service responsiveness is not yet fully stable. In this context, responsiveness needs to be improved through clearer response time standards and regular communication of service updates to customers..

In the assurance dimension, service quality relates to the ability of staff to provide a sense of security, trust, and certainty to customers. Telkom STO Sukaramai service staff

have essentially demonstrated professionalism by confirming complaints, explaining the cause of the disruption, and providing guidance on how to resolve it. However, research findings also indicate that service assurance is not always fully received by customers due to challenges in the way information is conveyed. One customer stated, "The explanation was actually quite clear, but there were some parts I didn't understand because it was explained too quickly." This statement demonstrates that assurance is not solely determined by the staff's technical competence, but also by their ability to convey information calmly, coherently, and easily understood. From a communication strategy perspective, messages delivered too quickly can diminish the intended impact of communication, even if the substance of the information is correct. Effendy (2011) explains that communication strategies must consider how messages are designed and delivered to achieve understanding in line with the communication objectives.

In the empathy dimension, service quality relates to the staff's ability to understand the conditions, needs, and emotions of customers experiencing service disruptions. In the case of internet complaints, customers often experience discomfort because network disruptions can disrupt work, learning, or daily communication activities. Therefore, officers need not simply provide technical answers; they also need to demonstrate personal attention through polite language, patience in explaining, and a willingness to listen to customer complaints. Customers' quotes about officers' explanations being "a bit quick" indicate that an empathetic approach still needs to be strengthened. Interpretatively, customers who don't fully understand an officer's explanation may feel underappreciated, even if the officer has provided information. Susanti and Edgina (2021) emphasize that empathy, ease of contacting the company, speed of the complaint process, and fairness in resolving complaints are essential elements in handling customer complaints. Therefore, empathy must be part of the service communication standard, not solely dependent on the personal characteristics of each officer.

Based on the analysis of the five SERVQUAL dimensions, the service quality of the Telkom STO Sukaramai Office in handling IndiHome customer complaints demonstrated the support of facilities, a ticketing system, internal coordination, and the use of digital media to expedite communication. However, service quality was not fully optimal due to weaknesses in response consistency, message clarity, and an empathetic approach to customers. These findings suggest that service quality is determined not only by technical success in resolving network disruptions, but also by the communication experience customers experience during the complaint process. Mofokeng (2025) emphasized that service quality is a crucial factor in building customer satisfaction, while Istanbuluoglu and Sakman (2024) demonstrated that successful complaint handling can strengthen customer trust in the company. Therefore, improving service quality at Telkom STO Sukaramai needs to be directed at integrating a reliable service system, rapid response, clear explanations, and more empathetic communication so that customers feel not only technically served but also valued humanly.

Customer Satisfaction in Complaint Handling

Customer satisfaction with IndiHome complaints handling at the Telkom STO Sukaramai Office cannot be understood as a quantitative number or category, but rather as a customer's subjective experience with the communication process, response speed,

clarity of information, and problem-solving provided by service personnel. In qualitative research, customer satisfaction is more accurately measured through narratives of customer experiences when they submit complaints and receive follow-up from the company. Sasongko (2021) explains that customer satisfaction arises from customers' evaluations of the service received compared to their expectations. In this context, IndiHome customers expect officers to provide quick responses, easy-to-understand explanations, and solutions that truly resolve service disruptions. Therefore, customer satisfaction is determined not only by the success or failure of technical problems to be resolved, but also by the quality of communication that accompanies the complaint handling process.

The study showed that some customers had a relatively positive service experience when officers were able to respond to complaints, contact customers through available communication channels, and schedule technician visits. The use of WhatsApp and telephone is an important part of building close communication between officers and customers. The field technician explained, "If we had WhatsApp, we would chat with the customer and make an appointment. We would ask them when they would be available to visit for repairs." This quote demonstrates that customer satisfaction can be built when customers feel involved in the complaint handling process, particularly through confirmation of visit times and assurance of follow-up. Interpretatively, this type of communication reflects the responsiveness and assurance dimensions of SERVQUAL, namely the speed of response to customers and the ability to provide service assurance. Kusaeni and Hidayat (2022) emphasized that service quality at internet providers is closely related to customer satisfaction, complaints, engagement, and loyalty.

However, research findings also indicate that customer experiences are not entirely consistent. Some customers still experience difficulties in understanding the information provided by staff, especially when explanations are delivered too quickly or lack detail. One customer stated, "The explanation was actually quite clear, but there were some parts I didn't understand because they were explained too quickly." This quote demonstrates that customer satisfaction is not solely built through providing information but also through conveying information coherently, patiently, and in accordance with the customer's ability to understand technical issues. From a service communication perspective, incompletely understood messages can create uncertainty and reduce customer trust in the complaint resolution process. Effendy (2011) emphasized that communication strategies need to consider how messages are designed and delivered to achieve the desired communication effect. Therefore, obstacles to message clarity can be a factor that can reduce the quality of the customer experience even if the technical process continues.

Overall, customer satisfaction with IndiHome complaints handling at Telkom STO Sukaramai is shaped by the relationship between service quality and communication quality. Customers tend to have a more positive experience when their complaints are responded to quickly, explained clearly, followed up decisively, and communicated with empathy. Conversely, delayed responses, poorly understood explanations, and a lack of personalization can leave customers feeling unattended. This finding aligns with Istanbuloglu and Sakman (2024) who stated that successful complaint handling can increase customer trust in the company and encourage repeat use. Therefore, improving customer satisfaction at Telkom STO Sukaramai needs to be directed at strengthening

more responsive, empathetic, and informative communication, so that customers not only receive technical resolutions but also experience a more humane and reassuring service experience.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the communication strategy for handling IndiHome customer complaints at the Telkom STO Sukaramai Office has been implemented through direct interaction, the use of digital media, internal coordination, and a service ticket system that helps the complaint follow-up process in a more focused manner. However, the research results also reflect that the success of complaint handling is not solely determined by technical ability to repair network disruptions, but is highly dependent on the quality of communication established between officers and customers. Clarity of messages, speed of response, certainty of follow-up, and an empathetic approach are important aspects that determine the customer experience during the service process. The research findings indicate that there are still obstacles in the delivery of information that is not fully understood, inconsistent service responses, and a personal approach that still needs to be strengthened. Therefore, this study emphasizes that service communication strategies need to be developed in a more responsive, humane, and consistent manner so that complaint handling not only resolves technical problems but also builds trust, improves the customer experience, and maintains long-term relationships between the company and customers.

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