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Cross - Cultural Communication Strategies Used By Hostess At Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali During Breakfast Service

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Abstract

This study explores the cross-cultural communication strategies employed by hostess at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali when serving guests during breakfast. This study aims to analyze the cross-cultural communication strategies employed by hostess at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali when interacting with guests from several cultural backgrounds.. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through distributed an online questionnaire. Participants of this study were hostesses at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali who has responsibility to do courtesy during breakfast services. The method of collecting data were carried out in stages, from preparing questionnaire to obtaining data to create a report. The data analysis carried out by conducting close reading, identifying themes, and descriptive narrative preparation because the data produced was in the form of short answers from correspondents. The results of this study showed that hostess implemented various techniques, such as the use of simple and clear language, and recognition of guests' cultural habits and preferences. In addition, adaptations in communication styles, such as the use of non-verbal cues and empathy, were proven effective in building good relationships. This study highlights the importance of cross-cultural communication training for hotel hostess to enhance guest experiences and create a welcoming environment. These findings are expected to be a reference for hotel managers in designing better training programs and improving service quality in the hotel industry.

Keywords: *Cross-Cultural Communication, Hostess Strategies, Breakfast Service*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi strategi komunikasi lintas budaya yang digunakan oleh hostess di Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali saat melayani tamu selama waktu sarapan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis strategi komunikasi lintas budaya yang diterapkan oleh para hostess di Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali ketika berinteraksi dengan tamu dari berbagai latar belakang budaya. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui penyebaran kuesioner daring. Partisipan dalam penelitian ini adalah para hostess di Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali yang memiliki tanggung jawab untuk memberikan pelayanan sopan santun selama waktu sarapan. Pengumpulan data dilakukan secara bertahap, mulai dari penyusunan kuesioner hingga memperoleh data untuk disusun dalam sebuah laporan. Analisis data dilakukan dengan membaca secara cermat, mengidentifikasi tema-tema, dan menyusun narasi deskriptif karena data yang diperoleh berupa jawaban singkat dari para responden. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa para hostess menerapkan berbagai teknik, seperti penggunaan bahasa yang sederhana dan jelas, serta pengakuan terhadap kebiasaan dan preferensi budaya tamu. Selain itu, adaptasi gaya komunikasi, seperti penggunaan isyarat non-verbal dan empati, terbukti efektif dalam membangun hubungan yang baik. Penelitian ini menyoroti pentingnya pelatihan komunikasi lintas budaya bagi para hostess hotel guna meningkatkan pengalaman tamu dan menciptakan suasana yang ramah. Temuan ini diharapkan menjadi referensi bagi para manajer hotel dalam merancang program pelatihan yang lebih baik dan meningkatkan kualitas layanan di industri perhotelan.

Kata kunci: *Komunikasi Lintas Budaya, Strategi Hostess, Layanan Sarapan*

INTRODUCTION

Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali is a 4-star hotel located in North Kuta, Bali, and is part of the global InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG). Known as an "express" hotel, it is designed to serve guests who are staying for a short period or in transit, thanks to its convenient location near Ngurah Rai International Airport. While most guests stay for just one or two nights, some choose to extend their visit and enjoy more of what Bali has to offer. Because of its express concept, the hotel takes a unique approach to guest service by focusing on key moments that matter especially during breakfast. Breakfast at the hotel runs for about four hours each morning, and this window is seen as a prime opportunity to connect with guests in a warm and friendly way (Leite-Pereira, Brandão, & Costa, 2022). The team, especially the hostess in the breakfast area, plays a vital role in this process. The hostess is not only responsible for managing the breakfast check-in list but also for making every guest feel seen and welcomed. A simple "good morning" or light conversation can go a long way in making guests feel at home (Saragih, 2024). For IHG Rewards members and regular travelers, these interactions often create a sense of belonging like being part

of a bigger hospitality family. If a guest doesn't come to breakfast, the hostess doesn't let that moment pass unnoticed. Instead, she follows up with a polite phone call to the guest's room checking in, offering assistance, and making sure everything is okay. It's a thoughtful gesture that shows the hotel genuinely cares, and it often surprises and delights guests who may not expect such personalized attention from an express-style hotel. This practice is more than just hospitality it's strategic communication. By building rapport and offering sincere, timely engagement, the hostess helps ensure that guests leave with a positive impression. Happy guests are more likely to return, leave good reviews, and recommend the hotel to others. In this way, the role of the hostess goes beyond logistics. Their ability to communicate with empathy, clarity, and professionalism directly contributes to guest satisfaction and the hotel's reputation. At Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali, every small interaction is seen as a chance to make a big difference and it all starts with a simple, well-timed conversation.

Guest who stay in Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali do not come from one country, therefore the hostess must master cross-cultural communication skills in order to communicate well when doing courtesy to guests. Eastern culture is very different with western culture, what is considered polite for eastern culture is not necessarily considered polite by western culture and vice versa. For example, asking about family circumstances, workplace, what you will do, and so on are polite for Indonesian people, but we cannot do same thing to other people's cultures because it can make them misinterpret the politeness to be impolite and make them feel unhappy (Gobelna, 2015).

The hostess must make a report of guest feedback list of the facilities, breakfast, and service provided into a daily report file that must be submitted to management every day. This aims to ensure if there are bad feedback is found on the report, the management can resolve it so that guests are not disappointed and their problems were resolved immediately without them having to report their own complaints to the receptionist. This concludes that the hostess must also courtesy guests who stay more than one day. For example, there are guests who stay for 7 nights, it means that they will go for breakfast about 6 times and will meet the hostess 6 times during their stay at the hotel. The hostess at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali usually provide courtesy to guests by asking about the overall stay and feedback on breakfast that day, if the guest will meet the hostess 6 times then it is impossible for the hostess to ask the same thing every day because it will make the guest bored and uncomfortable. Therefore, the hostess must have a good communication strategy and have different discussions every day so that guests can feel comfortable when communicating and there is no awkwardness between the guest and the hostess. In terms of cross-cultural,

differences in language style, communication style, discussion during courtesy, and social expectations are challenges for the hostess at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali. There are even some guests who do not like to be spoken to and seem rude when greeted, for example guests from France, they do not really like small talk or talking about things that are not important to them because in their country this is considered strange. The hostess must know where the guest come from before coming to do courtesy to in order to adjust the right communication culture to the guest (Vo Thi et al., 2021).

There are several theories that are relevant to this study, the first is Hofstede's theory of cultural dimensions. Hofstede (1980) analyzed several aspects of culture, such as individualism versus collectivism, these aspects affect the way people in various types of cultures interact. For example, guests from collectivist cultures tend to prefer a group approach whereas individualist cultures prefer personal attention. minimize interference in delivering messages so as not to hinder the reception of messages. The second theory is High Context and Low Context Communication. High context and low context are concepts introduced by anthropologist Edward T. Hall to explain differences in how people communicate across cultures. These concepts are important in cross-cultural communication strategies because they can affect how messages are received and understood by individuals from different cultural backgrounds. In high-context cultures, much of the information is conveyed through context, such as the situation, the relationships between individuals, and cultural backgrounds. The words spoken may only be part of the actual message. In low-context cultures, communication tends to be more direct and explicit. Messages are conveyed clearly, and there is little implied content (Broeder, 2021). The third theory is Intercultural Communication Competence Model (Spitzberg & Cupach). This theory is a framework that explains an individual's ability to communicate effectively and adaptively in a cross-cultural context. The model emphasizes the importance of skills, knowledge, and attitudes in achieving successful communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. And the forth theory is verbal and non verbal communication theory. Verbal and non-verbal communication theories are two important aspects of communication studies that explain how messages are sent and received between individuals. Both have significant roles in human interaction and can complement each other. Verbal communication is the process of conveying messages through words, either spoken or written. It includes all forms of communication that use language as the primary means of conveying information, ideas, or feelings. And non-verbal communication is the process of conveying messages without using words. It includes all

forms of communication that do not involve spoken or written language, but still convey meaning.

This study was also inspired by several previous studies whose research was almost the same as this study. The first study was conducted by Bernardo Miguel (2024) who examined in depth how cultural diversity and intercultural communication affect service quality and customer satisfaction in the hospitality and tourism sector in Brazil. This study found that the presence of cultural diversity in the Brazilian hospitality sector provides significant added value to the customer experience, although communication challenges often appear as a barrier. To overcome these barriers, effective strategies such as language training and cultural sensitivity programs are essential in improving service quality. The implementation of cultural competency training for staff not only creates an inclusive work environment, but also allows for the delivery of more personalized services that are tailored to the characteristics of diverse customers, which ultimately supports increased customer satisfaction and loyalty. The desktop research method used in this study helped collect data from existing sources at a relatively low cost, specifically focusing on the research gap related to the influence of cross-cultural communication in service management in the hospitality industry, which is different from the author's research focus which is directed at cross-cultural communication of customers at Ekpresiing Baruna Bali. Furthermore, research conducted by Annisa Putri Dinata, Fauzia Amelia Siregar, and Deasy Yunita Siregar (2025) analyzed politeness practices in cross-cultural communication by focusing on the differences in Asian, European, and African cultures in the use of positive and negative politeness practices. In Asian cultures, communication focuses on getting straight to the point, while placing respect and nonverbals as a means of maintaining harmony in social hierarchies. In addition, in European cultures, the communication approach is combined directly with various mitigation methods, such as the use of humor and politeness markers, which serve to keep the atmosphere relaxed and non-offensive. In addition, African cultures use inclusive language, storytelling techniques, and directness to strengthen group cohesion. This study establishes that the success of cross-cultural communication is highly dependent on the ability of interculturalists to understand and appreciate differences in manners, leading to clear communication, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings, and building strong intercultural relationships. However, this study is still limited to understanding the values of politeness and how to communicate in each culture, without examining in depth how to respond or deal with politeness ethics so that intercultural communication remains harmonious and does not cause discomfort or offense. Thus, this study needs to be further developed to provide practical direction on the right response

according to the cultural context of the message sender. In addition, Rana Ulfah Sepmiwati's (2021) research focused on the communication strategies used by receptionists at Quest Hotel Simpang Lima Semarang to improve customer service and loyalty. Using a qualitative descriptive method involving in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation of office leaders, all reception staff, and hotel guests, this study revealed that the main efforts made by receptionists were to meet customer needs by providing services that exceeded expectations. The application of socio-cultural strategies that treat customers as friends or relatives and a psychodynamic approach that emphasizes sincerity in service are consistently applied by employees to maintain good relationships with guests. Understanding transparency and responsibility when mistakes occur is crucial as well as part of a strategy in building customer trust and loyalty. This study specifically discusses how the receptionist handles customer complaints, especially regarding unprepared rooms at check-in, by providing responsive solutions and allowing staff to assist customers as best they can. However, this study has not explored the depth of proactive communication that can make guests feel comfortable when interacting with hotel staff during their visit, so it only focuses on problem-solving strategies when complaints occur. Therefore, further research development is needed to formulate a comprehensive communication strategy that can create a positive welcoming experience for guests and make them feel valued from the start.

Previous research has largely focused on enhancing employee understanding of cross-cultural communication in order to provide quality service to guests. However, there has been little to no attention given to how hostesses can strategically manage conversations to connect meaningfully with guests from different cultural backgrounds particularly in the informal and time sensitive setting of a breakfast service. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring how a hostess's communication strategies can help guests feel welcomed, valued, and not overlooked during their short stays at the hotel. What makes this study particularly unique is that, to date, no other research has examined the communication approach of hostesses in a setting like Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali, where courtesy to all guests is not just encouraged it is required by hotel policy. This presents an intriguing phenomenon worthy of deeper investigation. Engaging in conversation with unfamiliar people is already a social challenge, but it becomes even more complex when cultural differences are involved. In such situations, the hostess must carefully consider what topics are appropriate to discuss, how to avoid sensitive or potentially offensive subjects, and how to maintain a natural and friendly atmosphere that resonates with each guest. This research highlights the nuanced role of the hostess not just as a service

staff member, but as a key figure in guest experience management. The hostess is expected to approach numerous guests each morning, initiate meaningful conversation, monitor emotional cues, adjust discussion topics, manage the duration of each interaction, and still maintain the energy and positivity required for interacting with dozens, if not hundreds, of guests. It is a demanding task that requires both emotional intelligence and strategic communication skills. By examining this unique practice at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali, the study aims to offer fresh insights into cross-cultural communication within the hospitality sector. Furthermore, it seeks to serve as a practical guide for tourism professionals looking to enhance guest engagement and satisfaction through effective interpersonal strategies. This research has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the broader field of tourism communication, where human connection remains at the heart of exceptional service.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research method to explore the cross-cultural communication strategies used by hostesses during breakfast service at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali. The qualitative approach was chosen to gain rich, detailed insights into the hostesses' experiences and perceptions when interacting with guests from diverse cultural backgrounds. The subjects of the study are the three hostesses directly involved in breakfast service at the hotel. Data were collected using an online questionnaire via Google Forms, which included open-ended questions covering demographic information, communication strategies, challenges, and ways of overcoming cultural and language barriers. This method allowed respondents to express their experiences freely and reflectively. The data collection process was conducted over a period of one week, after which the responses were analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach. The analysis involved close reading of responses, identifying emerging themes, and compiling a descriptive narrative. Key steps included grouping data based on communication techniques, such as language use, non-verbal cues, and cultural adaptation strategies. The findings aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of cross-cultural interactions in hotel service settings and offer practical insights for improving communication practices in the hospitality industry.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Data Interpretation and Analysis

The analysis of questionnaire responses reveals that hostesses' work experience and regular exposure to foreign guests significantly enhance their cross-cultural communication abilities. This finding aligns with Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which emphasizes that competence develops through continuous, reflective experience. Hostesses who had longer work experience showed more confidence and agility in adapting their communication strategies, particularly when interacting with guests from culturally diverse backgrounds.

The variety in strategies applied by each respondent underscores the importance of flexible and empathetic communication, which reflects Spitzberg & Cupach's Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) Model. This model outlines that intercultural communication success relies on a combination of motivation, knowledge, and skills. Hostesses demonstrated motivation through their willingness to engage with guests, knowledge by learning cultural differences, and skill through verbal and non-verbal adaptation.

The empathy and patience shown by respondents also align with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory, particularly in the dimension of individualism vs collectivism. Guests from collectivist cultures often value harmony and respectful interactions, and hostesses who apply polite and inclusive communication styles are more likely to build rapport with such guests. This shows that effective hospitality communication requires cultural awareness that transcends language alone.

Language challenges were consistently mentioned, especially in interactions with guests who lacked English proficiency. The hostesses' use of translation tools such as Google Translate illustrates the use of strategic communication tools, in line with Hallahan et al.'s (2007) Strategic Communication Theory. This theory stresses the importance of purposeful, adaptive messaging to fulfill organizational objectives—here, ensuring guests feel heard and supported despite language gaps.

However, technology alone cannot fully bridge the communication divide. As Neuliep (2012) emphasized, unresolved linguistic barriers in intercultural communication often result in misunderstandings and guest dissatisfaction. Hostesses recognized these risks and expressed the need for better support systems, particularly in learning basic phrases in other languages and understanding cultural norms.

The absence of structured training in cross-cultural communication was a key concern raised by respondents. This reinforces Bhawuk and Triandis' (1996) argument that

intercultural effectiveness is not instinctive but must be developed through formal education and training. Respondents suggested the inclusion of practical content such as active listening, empathy-building exercises, and culturally specific communication etiquette as part of their development program.

In conclusion, the data strongly support the integration of theoretical frameworks such as ICC, Cultural Dimensions, Strategic Communication, and Experiential Learning into hospitality staff training. Hostesses at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali have demonstrated a solid intuitive understanding of cross-cultural interaction, but theory-based training would further enhance their professionalism and guest engagement.

Correlation with Previous Research

The results of this study provide in-depth insights into how the hostesses at the hotel face the challenges of cross-cultural communication. In this context, the results of the study can be linked to several previous studies that discuss cross-cultural communication and service strategies in the hospitality industry. The following is a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between the results of this study and previous studies.

4.4.1. Relation to Bernardo Miguel's Research (2024)

Research by Bernardo Miguel entitled "Effects Of Cultural Diversity And Intercultural Communication On The Quality Of Service And Customer Satisfaction In Hospitality And Tourism Settings In Brazil" shows that cultural diversity can enrich the customer experience despite challenges in communication. In this study, Miguel emphasizes that cultural diversity in the Brazilian hospitality sector adds value to the customer experience, although it is often faced with communication barriers that can affect customer satisfaction

The results of the Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali study showed that hostesses made an effort to understand the accent and cultural background of guests, which is in line with Miguel's findings that language training and cultural sensitivity programs can improve service quality. For example, respondents in this study mentioned the importance of understanding guest accents and using tools such as Google Translate to overcome language barriers. This suggests that investing in cultural competency training for staff can provide a competitive advantage and ensure customer satisfaction, which was also a major focus of the Bali study. Furthermore, Miguel's study highlights that effective communication strategies, such as language training and cultural sensitivity programs, not only improve service quality but also create an inclusive environment. This is particularly relevant to the results of the Bali study, where hostesses made an effort to create a welcoming atmosphere and respect for guests' cultural differences. Thus, these two studies complement each other

in highlighting the importance of cross-cultural communication in improving customer experience in the hospitality sector.

Relevance to Research by Annisa Putri Dinata (2025)

Research by Annisa Putri Dinata and colleagues on "Politeness Strategies in Cross-Cultural Communication" highlights the importance of cross-cultural competence in dealing with cultural differences. This study examines politeness strategies in cross-cultural communication, focusing on the differences between Asian, European, and African cultures. The results show that Asian cultures place greater emphasis on politeness, respect, and the use of non-verbal cues to maintain harmony and respect hierarchy.

The results of the study at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali showed that hostesses used a variety of communication strategies, such as polite and empathetic communication, to ensure that guests felt valued. For example, respondents mentioned the importance of being friendly, patient, and showing empathy when interacting with guests from different cultural backgrounds. This is in line with the findings that Asian cultures place greater emphasis on politeness and respect, which is reflected in the way hostesses interact with guests.

This study also emphasizes the need for a deeper understanding of polite communication etiquette across cultures. This is a challenge for hostesses in Bali, who must be able to adapt to the various cultural backgrounds of their guests. By understanding the differences in politeness strategies, hostesses can avoid misunderstandings and build better relationships with guests. Therefore, this study makes an important contribution to understanding how politeness and communication etiquette can influence cross-cultural interactions in the hospitality industry.

Relevance to Rana Ulfah Sepmiwati's Research (2021)

Research by Rana Ulfah Sepmiwati on "Communication Strategy of Receptionist Hotel Quest Simpang Lima Semarang to Improve Service" highlights the importance of communication strategy in increasing customer loyalty. This study uses a qualitative approach to explore how receptionists at Quest Hotel Simpang Lima Semarang interact with guests and handle complaints. The results of the study indicate that good and responsive communication is essential in building good relationships with customers.

Although the focus of this study is on receptionists, there are similarities in the approach used by hostesses at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali. Both emphasize the importance of providing service beyond what customers expect and building good relationships with guests. The results of the study in Bali indicate that hostesses strive to create a friendly and inclusive atmosphere, which is in line with the strategies identified by

Sepmiwati to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Sepmiwati also noted that it is important for staff to understand customer needs and expectations, and provide personalized service. This is reflected in the answers of respondents in Bali who stated that they strive to provide relevant and personalized service to guests. Thus, these two studies suggest that effective communication strategies and attention to customer needs are key to enhancing guest experiences in hotels

The results of the study at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali indicate that hostesses employ a variety of effective cross-cultural communication strategies to enhance guest experiences. This study can provide an important contribution to understanding how cross-cultural communication can be optimized in the hospitality context, as well as highlighting the need for cultural competency training and development for hostesses. The linkages with previous studies suggest that challenges and strategies in cross-cultural communication are relevant issues that need to be continuously researched to improve service quality in the hospitality industry. By understanding and integrating the findings from these studies, hotel management can formulate better policies and training programs for hostesses, so that they are better prepared to face cross-cultural communication challenges. This will not only improve customer satisfaction but also create a more harmonious and productive working environment for hostesses.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to comprehensively explore and analyze the cross-cultural communication strategies employed by hostesses at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali during breakfast service. The focus was on how these strategies are used to manage interactions with guests from diverse cultural backgrounds and to enhance the overall guest experience.

The findings revealed that hostesses face various challenges due to cultural diversity, including language barriers, contrasting communication styles, and differing social norms. To address these challenges, they applied a range of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies designed to foster positive and comfortable interactions.

Hostesses with longer work experience and greater exposure to international guests demonstrated higher levels of confidence and effectiveness in adapting their communication styles. Verbal strategies included the use of polite, empathetic, and patient language, such as adjusting tone and word choice to match the guest's cultural expectations. This behavior reflects Howard Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (1973), which highlights the importance of adapting communication style to foster familiarity and reduce social distance.

Non-verbal strategies, such as smiling, maintaining friendly gestures, appropriate eye contact, and managing personal space, also played a vital role in establishing rapport and conveying warmth. These findings align with Paul Ekman's Facial Expression Theory and Edward T. Hall's High and Low Context Communication Theory, where non-verbal cues are especially critical in high-context cultures for conveying meaning and emotion.

The study also emphasized the practical use of digital translation tools like Google Translate as a supplementary aid in bridging language gaps. While these tools help facilitate basic communication, they cannot replace the value of authentic interpersonal communication skills and deep cultural awareness. Therefore, interpersonal competence remains a core element of effective hospitality service.

Importantly, the findings suggest that the communication practices of the hostesses are not merely routine but reflect a deliberate and strategic effort. Their behaviors are consistent with Strategic Communication Theory (Hallahan et al., 2007), where messages and expressions are intentionally adapted to align with the hotel's service values, branding objectives, and guest satisfaction goals. In this regard, hostesses serve as frontline communicators whose interactions directly contribute to the hotel's strategic positioning in a competitive hospitality market.

The hostesses also expressed the need for more structured and continuous training in cross-cultural communication. This aligns with Bhawuk and Triandis' (1996) argument that intercultural effectiveness is not innate but must be cultivated through formal education and ongoing training. Practical training elements such as active listening, empathy-building, and culturally specific communication etiquette are essential to enhancing both individual competencies and organizational success.

In summary, the findings reinforce the value of integrating theoretical frameworks such as Intercultural Communication Competence (Spitzberg and Cupach), Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, and Strategic Communication Theory into staff training programs. The hostesses at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali have demonstrated a solid intuitive understanding of cross-cultural communication, and with theory-based training, they can further elevate both their professional growth and the hotel's guest experience quality.

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