

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

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 because this hotel location is very close to Ngurah Rai International Airport. While most guests stay for just one or two nights, some choose to extend their stay 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 four hours in the 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 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 (Grobelna, 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 western culture, 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 (Dhital,R.,2023). 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 Intercultural Communication Competence Model (Spitzberg and Cupach, 2000). 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 third theory is verbal and non verbal communication theory (Parianto & Marisa, S.,2022).. 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. The last theory is communication strategies theory (Hallahan et al, 2007) define it as “the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission.” This perspective

positions communication not merely as a functional tool but as a central strategic resource that integrates multiple disciplines to advance organizational objectives. According to Hallahan et al. (2007), strategic communication involves planning, execution, and evaluation of communication efforts to support an organization's mission. Rather than being limited to one area, it encompasses a wide range of organizational communication activities across several domains.

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 Holiday Inn Express 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.

1.2 Research Question

- 1.2.1 What communication strategies are used by hostess at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali during guest interactions at breakfast?
- 1.2.2 What communication strategies are most frequently used by hostesses at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali?

1.3 Purposes of Study

- 1.3.1 To describe the types of strategies that used by hostess at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali.
- 1.3.2 To describe the most communication strategies that used by hostess at Holiday Inn Express Baruna Bali.

1.4 Significances of The Study

1.4.1 For hostess

Help hostess better understand effective cross-cultural communication techniques that can improve their interactions with guests from several countries, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and professionalism.

1.4.2 For the hospitality industry

Offer valuable recommendations that other hotels in similar establishments can adapt to enhance guest experience and service quality.

1.4.3 For educational purposes

Serve as a learning tool for students and professionals studying hospitality management, communication, or customer service.