

Analysis of Hotel Receptionists' Intercultural Communication

التواصل الثقافي لموظفي الاستقبال في الفنادق

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Abstract:

The Mediterranean areas play a political and economic key role that is attracting international tourists. Individuals from different cultures bring different perceptions, value, systems, and languages to the host countries. Thus, intercultural communication is necessary to enhance the tourism activity. In this regard, the hotel receptionists' intercultural communication, including hospitality, should be compatible with the human resources for it may give life to tourism in the Mediterranean region. The lack of an effective intercultural communication is a barrier that hotel receptionists confront at the workplace when they deal with their clients' different cultures. The purpose of this paper is to analyse the intercultural communicative skills of the hotel receptionists at the workplace. It is based on the hotel clients' satisfaction and opinions about the front desk staff's performance.

Keywords: Hotel Receptionists, Intercultural Communication, Satisfaction, Front Desk

الملخص:

تلعب منطقة البحر المتوسط دوراً رئيسياً سياسياً واقتصادياً يجذب السياح إليها. ينحدر هؤلاء السياح من ثقافات مختلفة جالبين معهم تصورات، قيم، أنظمة ولغات مختلفة إلى البلدان المضيفة. لهذا، يعد التواصل بين الثقافات ضرورياً لتعزيز النشاط السياحي. وفي هذا الصدد، ينبغي أن يكون التواصل الثقافي بين موظفي الاستقبال في الفنادق وضيوفهم متوافقاً لأنه قد يمنح دفعا للسياحة في منطقة البحر الأبيض المتوسط. يواجه موظفو الاستقبال في الفنادق مشكل عدم وجود تواصل ثقافي فعال عند التعامل مع الثقافات المختلفة لعملائهم. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل المهارات التواصلية الثقافية لموظفي الاستقبال في مكان العمل وتعتمد على رضى عملاء الفندق وآرائهم حول أداء موظفي مكاتب الاستقبال. الكلمات المفتاحية: موظفو الاستقبال، التواصل الثقافي، رضى، مكتب الاستقبال

1. Introduction

The Mediterranean resources are attracting the international tourism giving the area a political and economic importance. People from different cultures bring various perceptions, values, systems, and languages to the host countries. The central problem of the Mediterranean tourism is that these differences must be compatible with the human resources. The main goal of the Tourism

Industry is to satisfy the customers and persuade them to come back on one hand. On the other hand, clients have

different attitudes, cultures and social values. This diversity makes working in the tourism sector a difficult task especially for the front-line employees who represent the whole organization. Hotel receptionists are the first country representatives to contact the tourists. They greet and welcome them at their arrival, they give the last impressions when clients leave the hotel, they respond to their requests for information or for hotel services, and they deal with their complaints in case anything goes wrong. Thus, it is important to measure clients' satisfaction, compare their expectations to their perceptions and use the results as a tool to improve the front desk service. In other words, the front desk staff's intercultural communicative needs can be identified through their clients' expectations, perceptions and opinions about the service quality. The hotel customers' level of satisfaction is the target of Hotel Management Business. The lack of an effective intercultural communication is a barrier that hotel receptionists confront at the workplace because language is not only a matter of accuracy but also a matter of appropriate language use, which is part of service quality. This study investigated clients' satisfaction with the hotel receptionists' use of intercultural communication. It aims at analysing the hotel front desk staff intercultural communication at the workplace based on clients' expectations, perceptions and insights.

2. Literature Review

Awareness of the different customs, rules and social behaviour in different cultures reduces the barriers caused by prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. Additionally, different cultural groups have different rules for the use of humour, irony, courtesy in speech, and rules of politeness. Roebuck (1998) says that to be successful in business dealings, individuals must be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences (aware of an individual's background and experience), use appropriate language, correctly interpret non-verbal communication (try to closely observe the body language), and value individual and cultural differences (learn to value, appreciate, and accept individual differences). Reisinger (2009) states that global tourism managers and marketers must develop high levels of intercultural communication and competencies and make appropriate adjustments to their business practices to suit a particular international environment. Hospitality also suggests a commitment to meeting guests' needs as the key focus in these essentially commercial operations and a nobility of purpose beyond the more venal commercial relationship implied in the hotel, the bar, or the restaurant (Lashley, 2008).

3. Methodology

The study is based on the hotel clients' expectations, perceptions, satisfaction and opinions about the front desk staff intercultural communicative performance. The needs analysis framework was used to explore the hotel clients' satisfaction with the receptionists' performance. Since empirical data were needed for the purpose of the study, the quantitative approach was employed. Additionally, it was impossible to deal with all tourists, so a probability sample, with a sampling error of 0.05, was used. About sixty structured interviews were conducted and sixty five-Likert scale questionnaires were distributed to a sample group of tourists who stayed at Gourara Hotel in Timimoun from December 25th, 2010 to January 2nd, 2011. The collected data were analysed using percentages, descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations as well as gap analysis.

4. Main Findings and Discussions

4.1. Clients' Nationalities

The majority of the hotel customers were Americans (40.00%), 18.34% of them were Italians, 15.00% were Japanese, 15.00% were British and only 11.66% were Malaysians. The hotel

clients included a diversity of backgrounds, accents, cultures, lifestyles and rituals. This diversity creates a challenge for the front desk staff that has to deal with these differences appropriately.

Nationality	Number of respondents	Percentage
US	24	40.00%
British	9	15.00%
Japanese	9	15.00%
Malaysian	7	11.66%
Italian	11	18.34%
Total	60	100%

Table 1: Distribution of Clients by Nationality

4.1. Importance of Intercultural Communication and Hospitality

Most of the participants (73%) said that the intercultural communication and hospitality language are very important at the front office. This implies that knowledge of a customer's culture helps the receptionist perform his job effectively and it comforts the client.

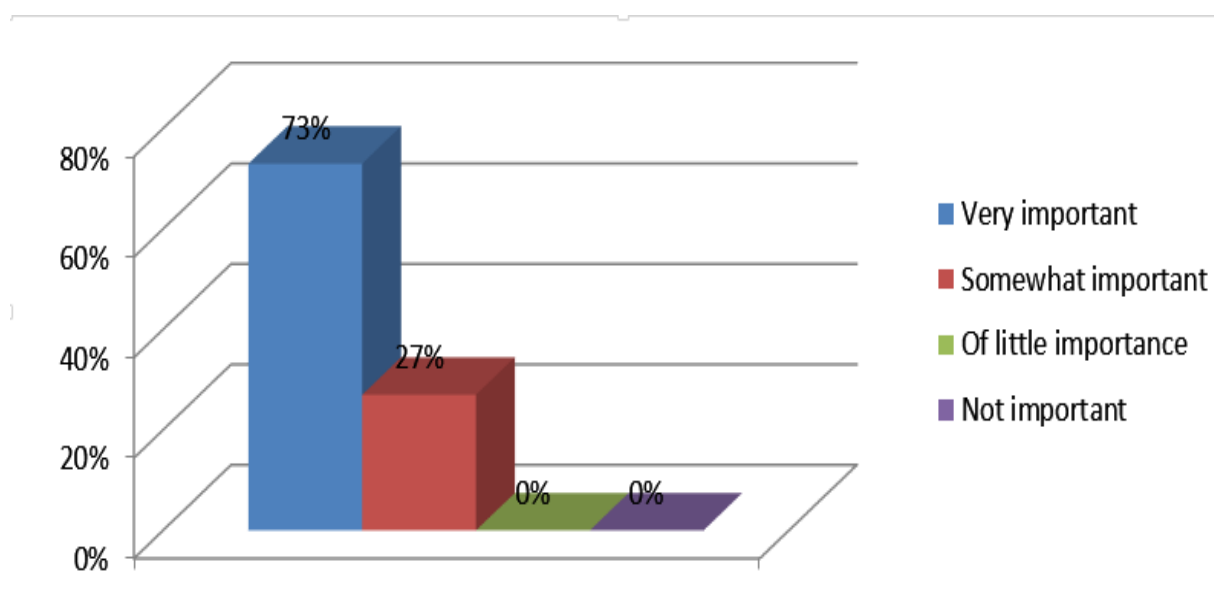


Figure 1: Importance of Hospitality and Intercultural Communication

4.1.1. Clients' Overall Satisfaction

Italians were the most highly satisfied customers with all the intercultural aspects performed by their hosts. This high satisfaction could be due to the fact that both the Algerian receptionists and Italian customers belong to the Mediterranean area and know a lot about each other's culture. Malaysians were dissatisfied with the intercultural communication performed by the receptionists who treated them in less friendly manners because they are regular visitors on one hand (They work in the area for more than 1 year). On the other hand, Algerians know little about the Asian

countries social values and cultures. In order to satisfy the hotel clients, the front-line employees should be courteous as all customers expect to be treated in a professional manner (Roebuck, 1998).

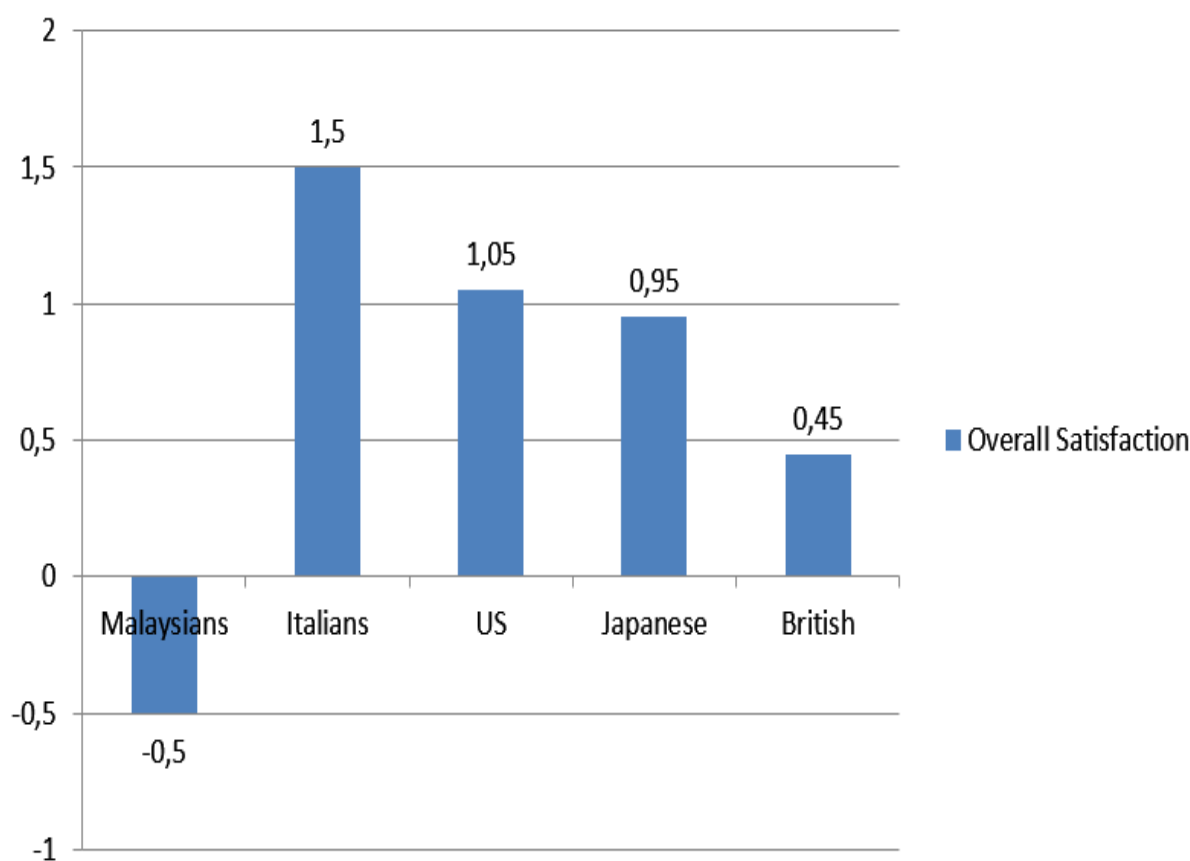


Figure 2: Clients' Overall Satisfaction

4.2. Clients' Satisfaction with the Intercultural Skills

This part of analysis presents the hotel guests' satisfaction according to their nationalities in order to find out if they were similarly satisfied with the different intercultural communication skills performed by the front desk staff or not. The word skills here refers to expressing courtesy, the tone of voice, the friendly welcome, the use of eye-contact and the use of gestures.

The highest satisfaction occurred at the level of welcoming the clients friendly and politely; however the least satisfaction occurred at the level of expressing courtesy. Courtesy provides the customer with trust and confidence and shows the ability of the employees to deal properly with his/her culture. The results imply that the hotel clients need to be more assured through the receptionists' courtesy manners.

Unlike the Malaysians, most of the hotel customers perceived that the receptionists expressed courtesy through friendly manners, used appropriate tone of voice and welcomed them friendly and politely. All customers were highly satisfied with the front desk staff's intercultural communication in terms of making appropriate eye contact when communicating and using appropriate gestures to show that they understood customers' needs. The results of the US clients showed that they perceived a very high level of eye contact maintaining. In the United States, the cheapest, most effective way to connect with people is to look them into the eye (Clarke and Chen, 2011). Maintaining eye contact is an excellent way not only to show respect but also to keep your attention focused on clients as well. Europeans and North Americans look directly into the eyes

when they are listening, whereas African-Americans look away. The front desk staff should learn how to use eye contact properly taking into account the culture of the client because cultures vary in the degree of acceptable eye contact.

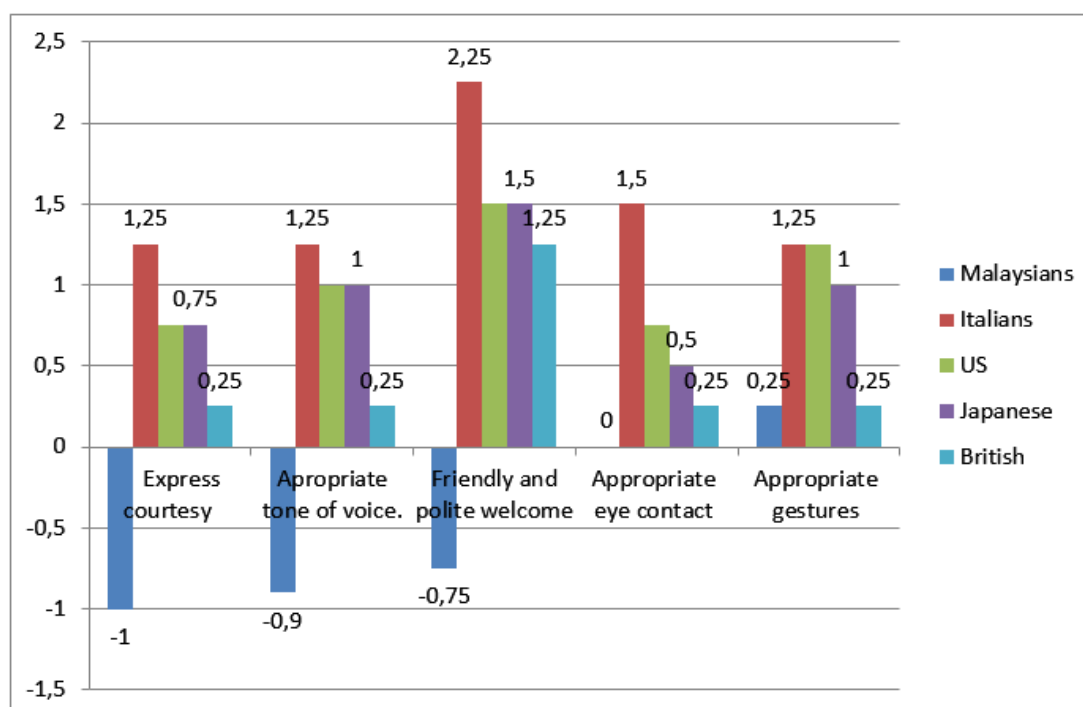


Figure 3: Clients' Satisfaction with the Intercultural Skills.

5. Recommendations

Knowing the rules of a culture is different from being prepared for dealing with the little misunderstandings that may occur at the workplace while interacting with customers. Most of hotel managers or owners do not organise training for their employees in order to make savings. They ignore that training contributes to the survival of their business. In order to improve the hotel reception service quality on-going intercultural awareness training should be arranged for the front desk staff before starting work and for on-the-job training. This strategy equips the trainees with the adequate knowledge to deal easily and comfortably with people from different cultures, avoiding misunderstandings and mistakes. The intercultural awareness training emphasises learning cultural dos and don'ts to avoid misunderstandings and to create respect between customers and their hosts. Additionally, it is necessary that tourism training centres, syllabus designers, or practitioners design an intercultural-content syllabus based on clients' satisfaction and insights. Intercultural communication including hospitality language, expressing courtesy, use of friendly manners, use of eye contact, use of body language and behavioural manners should be included in the syllabus as significant issues for the hotel business flourishing. Hotel receptionists should absorb much information through eye contact and use appropriate gestures to interact effectively with their clients. Moreover, they should inspire assurance through courteous manners.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed at analysing the intercultural communicative performance of the hotel receptionists who encounter some difficulties when dealing with tourists at the front office. The findings of the study indicated that knowledge of hotel customers' culture results in their satisfaction. The hotel clients' satisfaction differs from one nationality to another due to the

customers' different cultures, social values and attitudes. However, hotel clients expect their hosts to treat them in a professional way whether they are regular visitors or not. Hospitality and intercultural communications were opted to be very important in hotel reception profession. The research indicated that the more the front-line employees know about their clients' cultures, the more they succeed in satisfying them. Hence, at the workplace, on-going intercultural awareness training was suggested to as to provide the employees with intercultural knowledge. Moreover, practitioners or syllabus designers at tourism training centres should design an intercultural content syllabus based on clients' satisfaction and insights. The hotel receptionists should be aware of their customers' cultures and tolerate their differences. The further course of the research will include a larger sample group from different hotels. Moreover, hotel managers or employees will be involved as participants using more objective tools of research.

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