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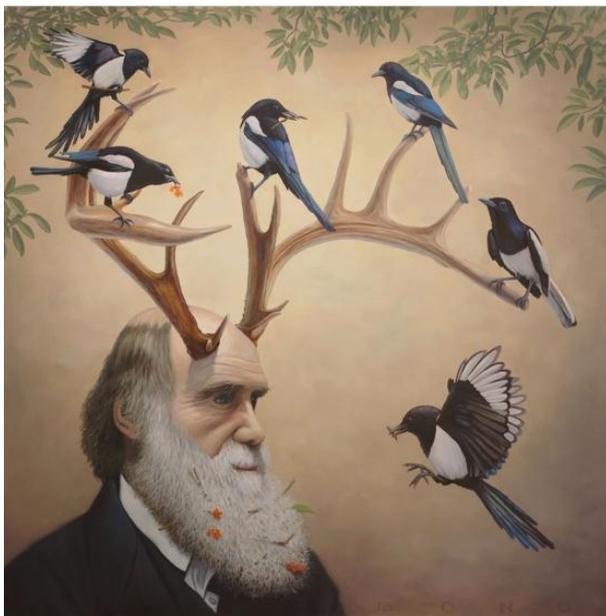
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# **Competitive advantage of intercultural communication knowledge among homestay entrepreneurs in Malaysian context**

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## **Abstract**

This concept paper will discuss the competitive advantage of intercultural communication knowledge among the homestay entrepreneur in Malaysian context such as the cultural values, religion, customs and etiquette via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, cultural values, religion, customs and etiquette at the target countries is one of the effective strategies in launching communication between the tourists and the hosts. In conclusion, effective communication will ultimately contribute to the smooth running of a tour which indirectly affects the quality of a vacation experience.

**Keywords:** Cultural, Values, Religion, Customs, Etiquette.

## **Ventaja competitiva del conocimiento de la comunicación intercultural entre los empresarios anfitriones en el contexto de Malasia**

### **Resumen**

Este documento conceptual discutirá la ventaja competitiva del conocimiento de la comunicación intercultural entre los empresarios anfitriones en el contexto de Malasia, como los valores culturales, la religión, las costumbres y la etiqueta a través de métodos de investigación cualitativa comparativa. Como resultado, los valores culturales, la religión, las costumbres y la etiqueta en los países objetivo son una de las estrategias efectivas para iniciar la comunicación entre los turistas y los anfitriones. En conclusión, la comunicación efectiva en última instancia contribuirá al buen

funcionamiento de una gira que afecta indirectamente la calidad de una experiencia de vacaciones.

**Palabras clave:** cultural, valores, religión, costumbres, etiqueta.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism can be described as the phenomena and relationship that exists between tourists and others, such as the host community and service providers. Tourism is the departure of individuals to destinations outside their residence and their activities. It is understood that business is the whole activity associated with the entry, residence and movement of foreign residents within or outside a selected country, town or region. This paper will define tourism as a temporary movement of individuals to their destinations (PRISTIWASA & REZEKI, 2017).

Business sectors and society are also associated with tourism. The relationship between tourist and society occurs when the tourist knows and understands the cultures, behaviours and histories of the places visited. On the other hand, society also must know the tourists' cultures and background to cater to their needs and necessities during their vacation. On the other hand, the business industry is also connected with the tourist to cater their needs such as for beverage, transportation and commerce.

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries today. With its rapid growth, diversification of tourism products and destinations are taking place, consequently, demanding new alternative types of tourism, e.g. small-scale nature-related and rural experience tourism. Within the total world market for tourism, rural tourism forms a relatively small sector but is of growing importance. The Malaysian government has taken serious efforts to develop the country's tourism industry via the 10th Malaysia Plan.

This plan aims to increase the contribution of the tourism sector as annual revenue. In order to achieve the target, the Malaysian government will also focus on the potential to attract tourists especially from Russia, India, China and the Middle East. Other initiatives introduced by the Ministry of Tourism as a comprehensive strategy to increase average spending of tourists from MYR2, 256 in 2009 to MYR4, 675 in 2020 was to encourage them to stay longer on each visit to Malaysia. According to Ng, the Ministry of Tourism aims to attract 36 million tourists and collect RM168 billion in revenue by 2020.

Communication and culture are important parts of intercultural communication. Communication is a process of conveying messages from one to another person through a channel. KREITNER & CARLENE (2012) defined communication as the process that made up of identifiable links which include sender, encoding, medium, decoding, receiver and feedback. Effective communication is needed to ensure the understanding between each

other is at the highest level. Communication is involved in all social life acts, being the constituent factor of creation and of cultural processes. Cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue are intensely discussed topics in today's society which is marked by globalization. Cultural differences are the core subject for studies addressing intercultural communication.

The term intercultural communication (IC) first originated in the United States in 1946 with the establishment of the Foreign Service Institute. It arose in response to the need to train foreign diplomats in the language and anthropological cultural understanding of different cultural groups. The term became ubiquitous and was associated with Hall's *The Silent Language* in 1959, where he applied abstract anthropological concepts to the real world and later extended the anthropological view of culture to include communication (JANDT, 1998).

Since then, culture and communication are associated in the literature investigating different cultures. Intercultural communication study is to study and understand how people from different cultural background communicate with each other. Then, its purpose is to produce a guideline which helps people to communicate better. This paper defines IC as an interaction between individuals or groups from a different cultural, religious and ethnic background, affecting the capacity to share meaning, behaviours, concepts and interpretations. The cultural difference can be explained in a few ways. The terms used

in this paper will describe the differences in three categories namely cultural values, religion, customs and etiquette.

Table 1: Three Categories Describe by This Paper: Cultural Values, Religion, Customs and Etiquette

Religion	This aspect is very important in human's life, it is the interdependence of human being to the spiritual being which is above and beyond human.
Cultural values	The core of the culture consists of values. These are general tendencies to prefer certain situations than others. Values are bipolar feeling. They have a positive and negative dimension.
Customs and etiquette	Social customs are set of shared norms, rules and attitudes governing the social events, such as the manner of greetings, eating and dressing. These elements of culture are observed in a very early stage of meeting people from another culture. Etiquette refers to ethical and socially acceptable behaviour regarding to the society or action among the members of the group in dealings with each other.

Culture offers tourist the opportunity to get in touch with the history, traditions and customs of other nations, that contributes to the development of self, to accommodate with the lifestyle of the population from a certain tourist destination. Looking at the intercultural communication model by TING-TOOMEY & CHUNG (2012), it is clearly shown that both individual A and B have their own cultural frame.

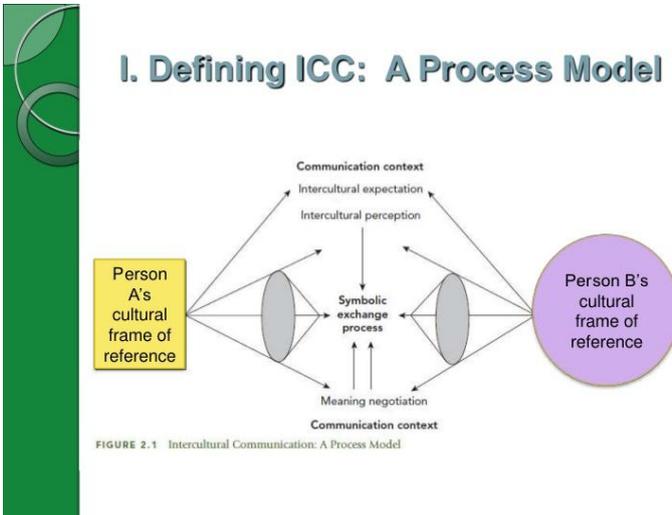


Figure 1: An Intercultural Communication model

This cultural frame needs to have a symbolic exchange process to get the meaning that both individuals could understand and negotiate. All of this information might influence by the communication context and intercultural expectation as well perception. It is because a different person coming from a different culture might have different expectation and perception on the issues discussed thus could create understanding or vice versa to get the meaning and the exchange process done perfectly without much hassle.

HOFSTEDE's (2012) work is the most cited research in six-dimension of cultural value system: power distance, individualism VS collectivism, masculinity VS femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long

term VS short term orientation and indulgence VS restraint. HOFSTEDE's (2012) theory helps in understanding the idea of cultural values which is regarded as fundamental knowledge for the cultural study. This cultural dimension presented by HOFSTEDE (2012) was very useful especially when it comes to analyzing the situation and the cultural differences during the journey as a tourist. HOFSTEDE's (2012) observations and analysis in cultural values and dimension have given valuable insight into this paper. This paper is aware of HOFSTEDE's (2012) ideas of culture which has been criticized by other scholars. To this end, this paper has also used Hall's dimension of culture in this study to complement the theory.

Table 2: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions (Adapted from <https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/>)

<b>HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSIONS</b>	
Individualistic / Collectivist	How personal needs and goals are prioritized vs. the needs and goals of the group/clan/organization
Masculine / Feminine	Masculine societies have different rules for men and women vs. less so in feminine culture
Uncertainty Avoidance	How comfortable are people with changing the way they work or live (low Uncertainty Avoidance) vs. prefer the known systems (high Uncertainty Avoidance)
Power Distance	The degree people are comfortable with influencing upwards vs. accept of inequality in distribution on power in society
Long Term / Short Term Orientation	Long term perspective, planning for future, perseverance values vs. short term past and present oriented
Indulgence / Restraint	Allowing gratification of basic drives related to enjoying life and having fun vs. regulating it through strict social norms.



Figure 2: The Cultural Iceberg Theory By Edward T.Hall

Figure 1 referring to the cultural representation as culture is often compared to an iceberg which has both visible (on the surface) and invisible (below the surface) parts. Elements of culture which we can plainly see, such as food, clothes, music, architecture are represented by the upper portion of the iceberg. Meanwhile, the elements which are under the surface are not obvious such as why someone eats or dresses the way they do, why they use the kind of solution for the kind of problem are represented by the underwater of the iceberg.

A smooth and effective intercultural communication requires a combination of Intercultural Competence (IC) and Communication Competence (CC) which is known as Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC). A study by HUANG, RAYNER, & ZHUANG

(2003) summarizes that IC in international business is about the ability of a person in building a relationship with someone from a different cultural background, managing complex conflict by overcoming hindrances and obstacles due to differences in culture and increase the capacity in dealing with people from a different culture.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

Malaysia practices Islam with other religions are also being practised. This basic information could help the tourist to understand why at certain homestay allowed Halal beverages or stick on their Halal label nearby the fridge or kitchen area and the Non-Halal label. Halal means permissible, a term designating any object or an action which is permissible to use or engage in, according to Islamic law. The term is used to designate food seen as permissible according to Islamic law as in this context. The opposite word of Halal is Haram, an Arabic term meaning sinful or typically prohibited, and in this case, refers to food consumption or dietary rules or food that is not to be consumed.

The tourism industry also involves communication that occurs in many ways, between the tourist from different cultures with the locals, between the employees of travel agencies with the tourist of different nationalities and between the tourist and the tourism service provider and many more. Therefore, effective communication is

needed to ensure the understanding between each other is at the highest level.

This understanding sometimes is hard to achieve if any parties is not open to intercultural dialogue or intercultural understanding. This could give a negative influence on the tourism industry if it happens in any tourism destination. Thus, it could also lead to negative ways of communication and at some level could lead to violent actions. In the perspective of the tourism industry this action could happen whenever the tourists interact with the local residents and at some point, the local will perceive the tourist is the intruders to their culture. These happen due to our ways of communicating things are shaped by our culture, attitudes, values, practices, expectations through the communication process.

### **3. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

A Muslim does not consume pork or anything derives from pork and alcohol, thus this should be respected by the tourist whenever they stay at a homestay own by a Muslim owner. There was a case been reported by the Facebook respondents, Pettire where a Muslim man feels offended when a Chinese tourist from China ate the pork that they brought as an outside food at the hotels dining area. This Muslim man was concerned about the contaminated cutlery and the plates that been used by many Muslim customers. If the hotels do not know this, they

will just wash the cutlery and the plates together with the rest of the plates as usual. However, if the cutlery and the plate had been contaminated by any pork source, it should have been clean accordingly with seven times wash.

The use of space and touch are pronounced in Islam because handshake or touching with other guys which are not family-related is forbidden or perceived as a taboo. For a devout Muslim lady, she will try to avoid a handshake from a stranger. Please do not be offended or judgmental as this is a way for them to show respect to the strangers and at the same time trying to practice their religion at their best. The Chinese handshake is light and maybe rather prolonged. Much older Chinese lower their eyes during the greeting as a sign of respect. Lowering eyes contact, according to western culture is a sign of inattentive. Therefore, being a homestay owner, especially if the owner is a Muslim, this should be explaining briefly in order to avoid any misunderstanding between the owner and the tourist.

According to GUDYKUNST & KIM (2003), cultural differences might have resulted in communication failure. This is consistent with the argument of HUNG & LIN (2013) who said that effective communication plays an important role in building a relationship. Therefore, the same thing will happen in the tourism industry and intercultural communications in the event of communication failure between tourists and the hosts, where the

conflict will arise and this will affect the quality of the tourist experience.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

In summary, intercultural communication has changed compared to before as people have more access to the world. But the differences between cultures still exist and people need to be aware of that fact. Gaining experience, accepting those differences and looking for similarities instead of differences create a good basis for effective communication across cultures. Overall, knowing others cultural values, religion, customs and etiquette of the people all around the world could help improve the effectiveness of communication between the homestay provider and the tourists. Although not comprehensive, it can serve as a guideline in communicating and to some extent could help in giving the homestay provider a better idea about in communicating with diverse people globally. Effective communication will ultimately contribute to the smooth running of a tour which indirectly affects the quality of a vacation experience.

NEULIEP (2006) lists four benefits of communication that could build relationships with people of different cultures or equally build intercultural communication, which is creating healthier communities, increased commerce, reduced conflict and tolerance through personal growth. While GUDYKUNST & KIM (2003) also

said in a casual or business communications, sensitive or concerned about other cultures are the key factors that make a successful intercultural communication. This clearly shows the understanding and caring for the three elements which are highlighted in this paper, namely cultural values, religion, customs and etiquette at the target countries is one of the effective strategies in launching communication between the tourists and the hosts.

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