

Hospitality Communication: A Phenomenological Study based on Local Wisdom of West Java

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ABSTRACT

Companies involved in the service industry face intense competition and rivalry. The ability to communicate is essential to improve the quality of their service. This study uses the constructivist method of Phenomenology and symbolic interaction theory to study this phenomenon. The purpose of this study is to explore and analyse the values of West Javanese local wisdom in improving communication competences, and develop a unique service concept, Hospitality Communication. This is proven to be a good concept in facing business competition, especially in enhancing tourism business in West Java.

Keywords: Local Wisdom, Communication competences, West Java and Hospitality Communication

INTRODUCTION

West Java has a diverse culture and beautiful natural attractions making it a top tourist destination both for locals and foreigners. This has also led to the mushrooming of tourism related businesses in West Java, such as hotels, restaurants, and entertainment outlets among others. This sector is highly competitive whereby businesses strive to increase their profits by improving the quality of their human resources, and most importantly their communication with their consumers and customers.

Customer complaints is the greatest enemy of tourism-related business, especially in this era of communication technology and social media. Studies have pointed to the power of social media in influencing public perception. Image is important for tourism-related businesses which directly affect their profit margin. Every business strives for a good

image and maintain its reputation - a good reputation can be achieved via a positive image. Maintaining a good image is the duty of every employee in the company, especially those who are in the front line

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 19 November 2015

Accepted: 04 May 2016

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dealing with customers, namely front desk staff, chamber maids and public relations officers.

Empirical evidence suggests most of the complaints from consumers and customers are related to poor communication skills among staff. Having good communication skills can be favourable to business. However, the importance of good communication has been overlooked or underestimated by many businesses.

Interpersonal communication, defined in the broadest sense, includes all interactions where there is a relationship between all participants (DeVito, 1997, p.232). For the purposes of this study, hospitality communication is included in the definition of interpersonal communication.

Interpersonal communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the most effective form of communication and results in minimal distortion of the intended message. Hospitality staff engaged in the tourism business deal directly with local and foreign guests and hence, good and effective communication is essential for every employee. Indonesia is a nation with diverse and rich cultures and has a tradition of good hospitality which can be revived to boost its tourist industry. West Java has many different cultures depending on the area. The places that the present author visited to get an idea of the local wisdom on hospitality communication are Garut, Tasikmalaya, Bandung, and Sukabumi. West Java is rich in natural heritage and culture which have attracted domestic and overseas tourists. The present author

believes that good verbal communication skills are the key to success of any hospitality related businesses and many of them unfortunately go under as they have not realised their importance. Therefore, this research aims to explore and analyse the values inherent in local wisdom in improving communication competences and to develop a unique hospitality communications concept typified by West Java culture.

THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

Phenomenology refers to human consciousness and is a subjective concept to understand social action. The phenomenological approach focuses on subjective experiences and is related to personal views about the world and one's interpretation of various events. This approach seeks to understand the phenomenal events experienced by individuals without the burden of preconception.

According to theorists of symbolic interaction, social life is essentially a human interaction using symbols. They are interested in how humans use symbols that represent what they mean when communicating with each other, and also the effects of the interpretation of these symbols on the behaviour of the parties involved in the social interaction. Adherents of the theory of symbolic interaction believe that human behaviour is essentially the product of their interpretation of the world around them.

George Ritzer (as cited in Mulyana, 2006, p.73) summarises the principles of symbolic interaction theory as follows:

1. Humans, unlike the lower animals, are endowed with the ability to think.
2. Ability to think is shaped by social interactions.
3. During social interactions, people learn meanings and symbols that allow them to apply their thinking skills.
4. In a typical human interaction, meanings and symbols allow people to continue with their actions .
5. People modify their actionbased on their interpretation of a situation.
6. People make modifications or changes to their action after assessing their relative advantages and disadvantages.
7. Action and interactions are linked to form groups and communities.

Thus, communication is exchange between two or more people, achieved through the use of conventional symbols, whereby cognition, feelings, and actions are implicit the a symbol.

According to Rose, as quoted by Mulyana (2001, p. 77) that: “The symbol is a stimulus that contains the meaning and value are studied for humans, and the human response to the symbol is in the sense of meaning and value rather than in terms of physical stimulation of tools senses”. Mulyana (2001, p. 78) further explains that “symbols have meaning if it

evokes in individuals who deliver the same response as it will appear on the individual destination”.

Communication occurs mainly through language, which is a set of symbols or a vowel or a written symbol system used uniformly or almost uniformly by members of a community. A symbol that is meant is described in the theory of the symbol, which is something that is deliberately used to condense or represent something else. Symbols consist of gestures and words.

Words used as a symbol has three functions: as a symbol of an object, as an attribute of an object, and as the object itself while the word has a denotative and connotative meaning. A connotative meaning is the feelings and attitudes associated with a symbol while denotative meaning is objects, events, or situations that are referred or indicated by words. Therefore, the meaning of an utterance is determined by individual experiences with respect to the words and the overall context in which the speech was heard, both verbal and nonverbal as well as external and internal.

Communications as observed in Garut, Tasikmalaya, Bandung and Sukabumi, take place through symbols. The communities of “*Kampung Pulo*”, “*Kampung Naga*”, and “*Kasepuhan Ciptagelar*” still remain faithful to their traditions and the local culture and way of thinking of their predecessors although certain aspects have undergone changes.

METHODOLOGY

The researcher interviewed basic and key informants for this study. They are those who understood well the local customs and local knowledge typical of West Java as well as those who understood the importance of good communicative skills in improving tourism-related businesses. Interpersonal relations that have been established well in advance between researcher and research subjects will be used by the former in order to obtain accurate and reliable information as well as open access to research and add to the subject so that researchers can gather information as much as possible.

A key informant is a person who is deemed capable of providing general information and is able to appoint another person who can provide more in-depth information (Koentjaraningrat, 1974, p. 130). Key informants in this study refers to experts in West Java culture who understand the values of local wisdom and customs of the Sunda region. This study used purposive sampling, a sampling technique used by researchers if they have certain considerations in sample collection or sampling for a particular purpose.

The researcher selected a few informants from the community who still practise customs of West Java. Some of the key informants included Yoyo Yogasmana, Umi, AbahAdi, Aki Darma (residents of the community “*Kasepuhan Ciptagelar*” in Sukabumi), Dr. Henny Gustini, M. Ag (Sundanese culture expert),

and a few members of the public from Garut, Bandung and Sukabumi. They were selected randomly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Garut is a city located between Bandung and Tasikmalaya. Its village is called “*Kampung Pulo*”. The author interviewed a few respondents there to discover local values as well as observe their daily interactions with others. Interviews were also conducted with selected informants from a village in Tasikmalaya named “*Kampung Naga*”.

Lecturers, researchers, and experts on the Sundanese culture were interviewed in Bandung by the researcher. The researcher also gained useful insights on the daily lives of villagers in a beautiful village called “*Kasepuhan Ciptagelar*”. The villagers were warm and friendly.

Direct observations of the daily lives of the people in West Java, especially Garut, Tasikmalaya, Bandung and Sukabumi, as well as interviews with the people there the researcher gained information on effective communicative skills, especially from the Sundanese region, useful for the services sector.

This research showed that the Sundanese people have effective interpersonal communication skills that are appropriate and useful for tourism-related businesses to learn and adopt.

Symbols and local wisdom are maintained by the community of *Kampung Pulo*, *Kampung Naga* and *Kasepuhan Ciptagelar* in their efforts to preserve their identity and culture,.

Based on the research findings, many of the values of local wisdom can be applied to the concept of Hospitality Communication. The West Javanese community has a set of values called “*Catur Rangga*”. Some of the values of “*Catur Rangga*” are:

- “*Someah hade kasemah*”, which means guests must be greeted with a smile, welcomed with open arms and shown generosity..
- “*Mipitamitngalamenta, nganggosucimangan halal, ngucapkalawan nu sabenerna*”, which means permission must be sought before attempting any action and integrity, honesty are crucial to a good living
- “*Munteunyaho kudu nyaho, mungeusnyahoulahnyaho*”, which means one should not be embarrassed to seek information or clarify on certain issue.. An important aspect of communication is to allows others to complete their speech before interrupting; listening power is important.
- “*Kudu akurjeungduluh, kudu hade jeungsaderek, kabaturtinggalnganggona*”, which means one should not fight but engage with the other with politeness and treat the other equally.
- “*Hade carekkasaderek, hade basakasasama*”, which means that when we confront others, it must be done with politely using good language.
- “*Hade gogog hade tagog*”, which means that our words are synonymous with our behaviour and hence our words must be followed with the right action.

- “*Basamahteu kudu meuli*”, which means that one should be generous with positive and good words and not be stingy on the information needed.
- “*Hade kuomong, gorengkuomong*”, which means that right or wrong communication is essential for progress and problem solving.
- “*Basatehcicirenbangsa*”, which mean our words and action are a reflect us. Thus, language is the identity of a community.
- “*Basatehgapurabangsa*”, which means that language is an important racial and national identity. Hence, we must be proud of our language.

The expressions “*CaturRangga*” (in Sundanese meaning Special Behaviour), has been passed on from one generation to the other. When linked with the theory of symbolic interaction, then it is the result of the ability of human conferring meaning for each symbol in the process of interactions.

The values of local wisdom as discussed in the foregoing is closely associated with the concept of interpersonal communication, which is characterised by informal and face to face interactions. The concept of Hospitality Communication in the context of this study has the following elements: friendliness, honesty, humility, generosity, equality, kindness, politeness, and compassion which are the foundation of all our actions.

According to Steward L Tubbs and Sylvia Moss (2003), effective communication is composed of the following five (5) elements:

First, a careful understanding and acceptance the contents of the communication.

Second, the communication is not only intended to deliver information and establish mutual understanding, but it is done in a pleasant manner in addition to offering comfort to the customer.

Third, influencing attitudes, whereby the communication process is actually intended to influence the attitude of others; to be able to influence others, we need a psychological approach in the form of emotional appeals.

Fourth, good social relations are imperative whereby communication is aimed at creating social relationships which are nurtured well. In the context of inclusion, it is necessary to reinforce the communication between the company and community.

Fifth, actions whereby influencing others can be successful if the people take action to achieve their desires. Action is the accumulation of the communication process and this requires knowledge of psychological factors that affect one's actions, in this case the expertise of employees in communication capable of influencing people to take real action. In the case of tourism-related business, the first acts of tangible actions could include buying behaviour and choosing hotels, restaurants, and tourist attractions specific to their liking.

Other factors that influence effective communication include choice of words, vocabulary or language used as it is a mode to convey information; in this case, the service officer or employee of a company must be clever in choosing words that are appropriate for specific situations. In addition, nonverbal messages also must be considered and used in addition to words spoken to strengthen and support the verbal messages. Nonverbal messages include the movement of limbs, facial expressions, gestures, and appearance. Indeed, nonverbal message that is consistent with the verbal message is a natural pair; our conscience is reflected in facial expressions and body movements.

Effective application of this concept helps to draw tourists and boosts business. The human resources division of the business must ensure effective communicative skills of its staff in order to achieve this.

Hospitality Communication is very important because it not only adds to customer satisfaction, but generates customer loyalty. Hospitality Communication is not just the ability to communicate, but also shapes the character of entrepreneur and employees who provide service with a sincere heart.

the first model below show how the hospitality communication is built from communications competences and local wisdom, and the second shows the process to gain customer loyalty.



Figure 1. 1st Model



Figure 2. 2nd Model

CONCLUSION

Hospitality Communication is a locally derived West Javanese concept, which means its application will vary from region to region and according to local culture. It can be adopted by tourism related businesses to lure tourists because of the appeal of the concept. Application of communication in the business world hospitality tourism in West Java, can be done through a special communication skills training to apply the concept of hospitality communication, given to employees and all parties involved in the tourism business.

Training by applying the values of local wisdom that were uncovered in this study is useful for enhancing the quality of service staff, and able to deal with customers in a friendly and professional way. Hospitality communication is one solution to improve the quality of service and to win customer loyalty.

Hospitality communication derived from local culture and local wisdom offer a competitive edge for tourism

related business especially now with the establishment of Asian Economic Community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the people of West Java, especially the people of Garut, Tasikmalaya, Bandung, and Sukabumi. Thank you to AbahAnom, the tribal chairman of Kasepuhan Ciptagelar, Sukabumi. Gratitude is due to Mrs. Henny, Mrs. Enok, and Mr. Enjang. Thanks also to the experts of culture and communication, as well as all those who have helped in this research process.

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