

The Role of Digital Applications in Supporting Face-to-Face Interaction Between Culinary Staff and Foreign Guests in Surabaya

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the role of digital applications in supporting cross-cultural communication between culinary staff and foreign guests in Surabaya. In facing communication challenges caused by language and cultural differences, digital applications such as digital menus, online ordering systems, and translation applications have become effective solutions. The method used is a literature study that examines various literature related to the role of technology in intercultural communication in the culinary sector. The results of the study show that digital applications help reduce language barriers, improve service efficiency, and create an inclusive culinary experience for international visitors. The implications of these findings indicate that the integration of digital technology in Surabaya's culinary sector can improve service quality and strengthen the city's competitiveness as a global culinary destination.

Keywords *Digital Applications, Cross-Cultural Communication, Culinary Arts, Surabaya, Digitalization*

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Introduction

Surabaya, as one of the largest cities in Indonesia, has become a major destination for domestic and foreign tourists. Along with the increase in the number of foreign visitors, the city's culinary sector has also grown rapidly. Many restaurants and eateries have begun to adopt digital technology to support operations and improve service quality. Digital applications such as online food ordering, digital payment systems, and other interactive features are increasingly accepted by customers, including foreign tourists who visit Surabaya to enjoy a variety of culinary specialties.

However, despite the convenience brought about by technological advances, the main challenge often faced by the culinary sector is communication barriers, particularly in interactions between culinary staff and foreign guests. Language and cultural differences often hinder the provision of optimal service. Staff who cannot communicate well with foreign guests can cause discomfort and even affect their culinary experience. Therefore, effective communication between staff and guests is a very important aspect in creating a satisfying and inclusive dining experience.

Cross-cultural communication plays an important role in overcoming this problem. In the context of globalization and technological advances, intercultural interactions are becoming increasingly complex. Digital applications now play a vital role in supporting communication between culinary staff and foreign guests, especially those from different cultural backgrounds.

Digital applications not only provide features that facilitate food ordering, but also help overcome language barriers that can affect understanding between the two parties.

Based on Hofstede's (2011) cultural dimensions theory, cross-cultural interactions are influenced by various factors, such as power distance and individualism vs. collectivism. For example, in societies with high power distance, where social status differences are highly valued, culinary staff may feel more compelled to show greater respect to guests. Meanwhile, in individualistic societies, customers may be more inclined to choose a more personal and independent experience. Therefore, digital applications that allow customers to order independently can help reduce tensions that may arise due to differences in social norms.

In addition, Hofstede (2011) emphasizes the importance of cultural values in influencing the way people communicate and interact. In this case, digital applications such as QR code menus and digital ordering systems can help reduce communication barriers, which often arise due to differences in language and cultural habits. For example, automatic translation applications such as Google Translate can help culinary staff and foreign guests communicate more smoothly, thereby reducing anxiety and uncertainty in these interactions.

By introducing digital applications in interactions between culinary staff and foreign guests, Surabaya can create a more inclusive and efficient culinary experience. However, despite the many benefits of digital technology, the main challenge that must be addressed is how to balance technological efficiency with the personal touch that characterizes local hospitality. Therefore, this study aims to examine how digital applications can support face-to-face interactions between culinary staff and foreign guests in Surabaya, as well as how these applications can overcome language and cultural barriers that may arise.

Method

This research method uses a literature study approach that focuses on collecting and analyzing secondary data sources without conducting interviews or direct observations. This approach allows for a comprehensive and systematic study of scientific articles, news, industry reports, and journals relevant to culinary services, digital applications, and cross-cultural communication. This study specifically focuses on face-to-face interactions between culinary staff and foreign guests in Surabaya with the support of digital applications, so that the study attempts to integrate various findings from existing literature to obtain a complete picture (Dirsehan, 2021).

The literature used in this study involves relevant cross-cultural communication theories, such as Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (Gudykunst, 2005), which discusses how uncertainty can be managed in cross-cultural interactions, and cross-cultural adaptation theory (Kim & Gudykunst, 2003), which focuses on cultural adaptation in an international context. The thematic analysis process was carried out by critically reading, coding themes, and compiling systematic interpretations of the available data. Each source used in this study was selected based on its credibility and relevance to the topics of cross-cultural communication and digitalization in the culinary industry.

To analyze the data, the author identified several main themes, such as the role of digital applications, communication barriers, and cultural adaptation strategies in interactions between staff and foreign guests. The analysis was conducted narratively by linking cross-cultural communication theories with findings obtained from existing literature, as well as relating these theories to practices in the field. This process involved an in-depth reading of relevant scientific journals, articles, and industry reports to obtain a more comprehensive picture of this topic.

Result and Discussion

A. Surabaya's Culinary Industry in the Dynamics of Globalization and Digitalization

The culinary industry in Surabaya, which is growing rapidly alongside the increase in foreign tourist visits, has created a greater need for cultural adaptation in the service

sector. With the arrival of various types of international tourists who bring different customs and cultures, the challenge of cross-cultural communication has become increasingly relevant. This is especially true in interactions between culinary staff who may not be accustomed to communicating in foreign languages and foreign guests who may not be familiar with local cultural norms.

Surabaya's culinary sector, known for its traditional hospitality, now faces an urgent need to integrate digital technology into its services. Digitalization offers practical solutions to reduce these communication barriers. For example, applications such as QR code menus, digital ordering systems, and automatic translators (such as Google Translate) make it easier for foreign guests who may not be fluent in Indonesian to place orders more smoothly. This digitalization allows international customers to feel more independent and reduces their dependence on direct interaction with staff who may have language difficulties.

For example, the implementation of multilingual digital menus in several well-known restaurants in Surabaya allows guests to choose from the menu using their own language. This reduces the possibility of misunderstandings that often occur when staff try to explain the menu in Indonesian, which foreign guests may not fully understand. This is also in line with Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions, where cultural differences in power distance often influence expectations in communication. Digital applications provide guests with the space to independently manage their experience, which is more in line with the culture of individualism often found among international tourists.

However, while digitization offers convenience, there is a risk of dehumanization in the guest experience. Yudhiasta (2022) shows that although technology speeds up transactions and increases efficiency, the feeling of alienation among customers who only interact with machines or digital screens often reduces the warmth and openness that characterize Indonesian hospitality. This shows that technology must be used carefully, considering the balance between efficiency and personal relationships that prioritize local cultural values.

B. The Role of Digital Applications in Hybrid Hospitality Services

The implementation of the hybrid hospitality model in Surabaya shows how technology can combine digital efficiency with a human touch. For example, several well-known hotels and restaurants such as Aloft Surabaya Pakuwon City have adopted an online booking system that allows guests to easily book rooms, food, and other services through an app. Meanwhile, direct interaction is maintained in the form of a warm welcome from staff who speak English and Indonesian.

This hybrid hospitality concept helps reduce barriers to cross-cultural communication. Through apps such as GrabFood and GoFood, international customers can order food quickly and efficiently without having to rely on the language skills of staff. Apps like these not only enable easier booking but also facilitate communication without the need for face-to-face interaction. This contributes to the Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory developed by Gudykunst (2005), which emphasizes that technology can reduce anxiety in cross-cultural communication by reducing the uncertainty that arises from language and cultural differences.

However, even though this tech has a lot of benefits, there are challenges in adapting the restaurant staff's culture to balance the convenience of tech and the warmth of traditional service. Hidayati & Saptaria (2020) show that in some traditional food stalls that aren't used to tech, digital literacy is a big obstacle. Staff who aren't familiar with digital apps can lower service quality and create an unpleasant experience for foreign guests.

Another challenge faced is the frequent translation errors in translation applications. For example, Google Translate often fails to accurately translate context, which can lead to unwanted miscommunication. As discussed by Kim & Gudykunst (2003) in cross-cultural

adaptation theory, the use of translation applications can indeed reduce uncertainty, but errors in translation can increase anxiety for staff and foreign guests.

C. Intercultural Communication Strategies with the Help of Technology and Theoretical Foundations

In Surabaya's culinary sector, intercultural communication strategies heavily depend on the ability to integrate technology with a personal touch. Hofstede's Dimensions of Culture provides a framework for understanding how different cultural values influence the way people communicate. For example, in more collectivist cultures, such as those often found in Indonesia, the values of togetherness and harmony in interactions are emphasized. However, more individualistic foreign tourists may feel more comfortable if given the freedom to manage their orders independently through an app.

In line with this, Gudykunst's Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory (2005) shows that digital tools such as online ordering apps and automatic translators help alleviate the anxiety and uncertainty that often arise when two parties from different cultures interact. These apps allow staff to focus more on providing friendly and personalized service, while guests can interact more easily with technology without feeling awkward due to language limitations.

However, one thing to note is resistance to change among older staff or those who are unfamiliar with digital technology. Yudhiasta (2022) notes that although digital technology is very useful, staff who are less tech-savvy may feel anxious or even reluctant to use these applications, which ultimately affects service quality. Therefore, regular training and integration between technology and local culture are very important. Hambali & Andarini (2021) suggest that training based on digital literacy and cross-cultural competence be provided to culinary staff in Surabaya to bridge the gap between technology and traditional hospitality.

D. Constraints and Challenges in Implementing Hybrid Hospitality

Some of the main obstacles faced by Surabaya culinary businesses in implementing hybrid hospitality include:

1. **Staff digital literacy:** Many culinary businesses, especially food stalls or MSMEs, still face difficulties in operating digital applications. As explained by Hidayati & Saptaria (2020), staff who are not trained in using digital applications can reduce service quality and even risk creating an inadequate experience for foreign guests.
2. **Translation errors:** Although translation applications can help overcome language barriers, the translations are often inaccurate or contextually inappropriate, which can cause discomfort. As described by Kim & Gudykunst (2003), the use of automatic translators can reduce uncertainty, but also risks creating misunderstandings if not translated correctly.
3. **Cultural differences in food preferences:** Foreign guests may have very different preferences regarding food, meal times, and ordering methods, which can cause culture shock. For example, guests from low-context communication cultures may feel uncomfortable if they are not given sufficient information about how to order food or the applicable procedures.

Conclusion

Surabaya's culinary industry is now increasingly visited by foreign guests and travelers from various countries, requiring businesses to continuously innovate in improving service quality. Digital applications such as online menus, electronic cash registers, self-ordering, and translation apps have proven to facilitate interaction between staff and foreign guests who may experience language and cultural differences. A literature review of journals and news articles over the years shows that the implementation of hybrid hospitality, combining digital technology and face-to-face service, is the best strategy for creating satisfaction among foreign guests while maintaining the character of Surabaya's local hospitality.

In practice, digital menus and cashier applications speed up the transaction process, minimize miscommunication, and provide a modern experience for international visitors. Translation apps are very helpful for staff who are not yet fluent in foreign languages, so that basic interactions such as reservations, special requests, or informal communication can run smoothly. However, the use of digital technology must always be balanced with friendly and humanistic personal interaction, because true hospitality is not only about service efficiency, but also the comfort and warmth of welcoming guests from different backgrounds.

The challenges faced by Surabaya businesses include staff digital literacy, miscommunication in translation applications, and differences in cultural characteristics and ethics. These issues can be overcome through training and adjustments to SOPs that emphasize collaboration between technology and Surabaya's local characteristics. Compared to other cities, Surabaya is able to demonstrate hybrid hospitality that is not only sophisticated, but also prioritizes traditional values and family relationships. Hybrid hospitality serves as a strategic and innovative solution to tackle international culinary competition while strengthening Surabaya's global image as a welcoming, open, and technologically advanced culinary tourism hub.

Ultimately, the integration of digital applications and local hospitality not only enhances service quality but also serves as a key asset for SMEs, businesses, and the city government in promoting Surabaya as a cross-cultural culinary tourism destination. Further research could deepen the analysis through field case studies and direct observations of foreign customers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of hybrid hospitality.

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