The Role of Intercultural Communication Competence on Service Reliability and Customer Satisfaction

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Abstract: *The article presents an inclusive framework on three major constructs namely intercultural communication competence, service reliability and customer satisfaction in the grocery retail settings in Malaysia. The constructs' validity and reliability were examined based on structural equation modeling. Based on the proposed framework, a number of propositions were developed to facilitate empirical investigation on intercultural communication competences of the selected grocery retail outlets. This contributes to the development of a theory based path model that links the intercultural communication competence to service reliability and customer satisfaction. While numerous scholars have considered the extensive topics of service quality and customer satisfaction, however, none of those studies explored on the critical role of intercultural communication competence and incorporated the construct with perceived service quality and customer satisfaction. One of the most critical finding of the study is the dimension of perceived service quality and intercultural communication competence have positive relationship and it also progressive finding for further research on other dimensions of perceived service quality.*

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Introduction

Increasing the recognition of the significance of services, there is a growing awareness that the competitive strategies in retailing may integrate a framework of intercultural service quality assessment and enhancement (Ahmad et al., 2014; Briones et al., 2009). This has given rise to the notion of measuring the service quality (SQ) with cultural aspects in retailing, which has become a crucial element in the retailer business (Cameran et al., 2010). Integration in emerging economies, globalisation, elimination of trade barriers and innovations in technology have facilitated and compelled the retailers to internationalise many value chain activities (Hutchinson et al., 2009). Nevertheless, despite suggestions of enlarged cultural homogeneousness (Keillor et al., 2001), the retailers continue to struggle in overseas markets due to their inability to understand and overcome cultural differences (Hopkins et al., 2009). Obviously, the evaluation of service experiences and measurement of customer satisfaction cannot be performed without cultural dimension (Sharma et al., 2012; Ihtiyar et al., 2013). Developments on multiculturalism in marketing in the past decades have focused on how cultural aspects influence customer choices (Huang et al., 2013), interpersonal interaction (Sharma et al., 2012), employee performance (Kong and Jogaratnam, 2007; Sizoo et al., 2005), service evaluation (Sharma et al., 2012; Paswan and Ganesh, 2005), customer satisfaction (Hopkins et al., 2009) and purchase intention (Teng and Laroche, 2007). Increasingly greater complexity of the retail atmosphere - density of growing competition, demanding customers and shopping attitudes of customers, the capability of retailers to offer a satisfactory service may be crucial and attractive manoeuvre to differentiate and actively satisfy the customers (Martinelli and Balboni, 2012). In fact, the tools usually used by the retailers for competition and promotion, such as low price and combined merchandise offers, may influence the effectiveness in competition negatively since the offers perceived as homogeneous by customers. In other words, in order to improve level of service performance as well as the customers' perception of it, the retailers make different moves to better satisfy their potential customers. When managing cultural issues in the multicultural atmosphere, intercultural communication competence (IC) that deals with having the right mind set, skill and sensitivity, is rising as a crucial aspect for intercultural service encounters (ISEs) and has become a new research theme in ensuring customer satisfaction (CS) (Sharma et al., 2012; Ladhari, 2009). CS with highly satisfied service experiences has positive effect on enhancing customer retention, long-term business success, positive word of mouth, loyalty, cost-effectiveness and sustainable competitiveness (Martinelli and Balboni, 2012; Kim et al., 2010; Ladhari, 2009).

Although, general acceptance on significance of IC, particularly for service providers operating in various cultural settings, most of existing discussions are conceptual and qualitative based. However, many authors such as, Sharma et al. (2012); Ueltschy et al. (2007); Friedman and Antal, (2005) suggest that measurement of service quality for service settings in multicultural societies may include cultural dimension for better understanding customers from various cultural backgrounds.

However, some the existing models do not include 'culture' as a dimension such as SERVQUAL and RSQS. Therefore, the gap exists in providing empirical evidence on the relationships between the intercultural communication competence, service reliability and customer satisfaction, particularly in a specific industry type that operates in multicultural atmosphere and emerging economy.

The aim of the study is to examine the role of intercultural communication competence (IC) on service reliability (R) and customer satisfaction (CS) in grocery retailing of Malaysia. This study particularly investigates IC in terms of inter-role congruence (IC4) and interaction comfort (IC1, IC2 and IC3), as highlighted in Table2. The study examines service reliability aspect of perceived service quality, which was developed by Dabholkar et al. (1996). Furthermore, the dimension of customer satisfaction is based on product quality (CS1 and CS2), product assortment (CS3) and price (CS4).

In order to meet the research goals, the study improves and empirically investigates the theoretical model of interrelationships among these three constructs. According to the proposed framework, R mediates the impact of IC on CS. Service reliability and validity of the constructs was assessed using confirmatory factor analysis. Then, structural equation modelling (SEM) was employed to estimate the interrelationships among constructs and to compare proposed model.

Following this introduction section, the present study indicates a literature review and develops the hypothesised relationships among the constructs of the proposed model. The methodology of empirical study of the proposed model is then represented. This is followed by a presentation of the research findings as well as their implications.

Literature Review

Intercultural Communication Competence (IC)

Intercultural communication competence is the ability to think, discriminate the differences, manage the experiences appropriately, and build an efficient communication with people from different cultures in the multicultural society (Friedman and Antal, 2005). Instead of this widely definition, there is a consensus about its influences on intercultural interactions (Lloyd and Luk, 2011; Ward, 2008). People with higher IC show a greater capability to learn different aspects of other cultures, such as foreign languages and cultural norms. Furthermore, they can integrate with other cultures undoubtedly (Lustig and Koester, 2009). As emphasised in the interdependence theory (Surprenant et al., 1983), each part of interaction has been influenced from another part, because the behaviour of the first part is having an impact on the second part. Furthermore, interactions among intercultural service encounters (ISEs) may establish or eliminate the barrier due to perceived dissimilarities in behavioural norms (Lustig and Koester, 2009). Thus, individuals with higher IC show more respect and responsiveness for people from other cultures, respond to unfamiliar behaviours in a non-judgmental way without showing visible or perceivable discomfort (Sharma et al., 2012). Furthermore, they willingly use their knowledge and experience about other cultures to manage various expectations and reduce the uncertainties of ISEs during the service delivery, compared to those with lower IC (Wang and Mattila, 2011; Lustig and Koester, 2009).

Although interaction comfort has significant impact on achieving, a satisfactory outcome that is particularly related customers' collaboration (Sharma et al., 2012). However, expectations or perceptions and interactions of customers' in the service marketing literature have been tested without IC in past decades (Wang and Mattila, 2010; Yu et al., 2001). Table 1 represents several previous studies related to the intercultural context in the marketing.

Due to the achievable service outcome is highly related the role clarity (Sharma et al., 2012), role clarity becomes one of the crucial items for the model. Role clarity is identified as the both sides of interaction recognise and accept each other's role in interaction (Solomon et al., 1985). Rarely, ISEs in familiar cultures, they may have different expectations or perceptions about each other, or they do not always tolerate with their role in society (Baker et al., 2009). Therefore, as mentioned in role theory

(Solomon et al., 1985), confusion or misunderstanding about role clarity breaks the communication among ISEs and lead to dissatisfaction.

Table 1. Some of the Recent Conceptualizations of Intercultural Communication Competence in the Marketing Literature

Author	Concept	Definition
Sharma et al. (2012)	Intercultural	"This article presents a conceptual framework for intercultural service encounters applicable to both consumers and employees." (p. 227)
Baker et al. (2009)	Intercultural	"This paper aims to report a study that focuses on the moderating role of involvement in the relationships between consumer contact employees' consumer orientation and service quality perceptions and satisfaction." (p.115)
Reimann et al. (2008)	Intercultural	"This article addresses the issue of cultural differences in the context of business-to-business relationships." (p.63)
Ward (2008)	Intercultural	"The paper pays tribute to the work of John Berry and the organizational frameworks that he has proposed for research on identity, acculturation and intercultural relations. It also suggests that over-reliance on these frameworks may constrain developments in the field." (p.105)
Kong and Jogaratman (2007)	Intercultural	"This research extends previous work by examining cross-cultural differences and intends to provide a better understanding of restaurant consumers in the USA and Korea, as well as to enable restaurant operators and managers to better service their clientele in the global marketplace." (p.275)
Friedman and Antal (2005)	Intercultural	"This article offers an alternative approach to intercultural communication competence, 'negotiating reality', that engages cultural conflict as a resource for learning." (p.69)

Sizoo et al. (2005)	Intercultural	"This study proposes adding to that trend by attempting to measure the effect of intercultural sensitivity on the cross-cultural performance of service employees." (p.245)
Ryoo (2005)	Intercultural	"This study presents an in-depth analysis of talk between Korean immigrant shopkeepers and their African-American consumers in service encounters." (p.79)
Paswan and Ganesh (2005)	Intercultural	"This study empirically investigates the notion of being comfortable with social interaction in a foreign country (interaction comfort) and its impact on how service quality is evaluated." (p.93)
Hopkins et al. (2005)	Intercultural	"The value of this paper is that it uses cultural identity theory to extend an existing model that examines the nature and determinants of consumer expectations of service." (p.329)
Yu et al. (2001)	Intercultural	"This paper presents a conceptual framework and research approach for examining the intercultural communication competence (IC) of Chinese tour guides, the factors that contribute to IC, and the impacts of IC on Chinese tourists' satisfaction with their experience" (p.75)

Author's own work

Service Quality from the Retail Perspective

Service quality (SQ) is a fundamental strategy for sufficient superior performance in grocery retailing; however, customers' demand not simply products or affordable prices but also convenience-shopping experience (Martinelli and Balboni, 2012). Previous studies addressed to measuring SQ in the retailing settings have often started from SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988; 1985). The scale operationalizes SQ by calculating differences between customer's expectations (desired level) and recent performances (perceived level), by evaluating both in relation to 22 items that are classified under five broad categories. The services are evaluated as excellent if recent performance is higher than expectations; it is considered as satisfied, if it only equals expected level; services are classified as dissatisfied, if it does not meet expectations of customers (Vesel and Zabkar, 2010). The SERVQUAL scale has been examined in great number of studies conducted in

various service settings such as; health care (Padma et al., 2010), professional services (Cameran et al., 2010), information systems (Kettinger et al., 2009), tourism industry (Jani and Han, 2011), higher education (Trivellas and Dargenidou, 2009), professional services and fast food (Cronin and Taylor, 1992), banking (Amin and Isa, 2008) and retail settings (departmental and/or discounted stores) (Vesel and Zabkar, 2010; Zhao et al., 2002; Mehta et al., 2000; Dabholkar et al.,1996).

Yet, SERVQUAL scale has also been criticized by many authors such as, Das et al. (2010); Caro and Garcia, (2007); Mehta et al. (2000) and Babakus and Boller, (1992); they suggested that model requires modification and customization to specify features of the industry. The first reason of criticism is as highlighted in study of Wall and Payne (1973), customer's expectations (desired level) of services marked higher than performance (perceived level) of services by customers. Another challenge in the model, realization of E (expectation) and P (perception) version of SERVQUAL caused confusion on participants, and data quality is influenced by confusion and apathy (Brandon-Jones and Silvestro, 2010; Bouman and Van Der, 1992). For instance, Babakus and Boller (1992) used the SERVQUAL scale to measure SQ in their study, and they found that, as employed in the SERVQUAL scale, score relies in perception more significant than expectation. Finn and Lamb (1991) used SERVQUAL scale among four different types of the retailers in numerous sizes, and they concluded that scale is not applicable for the retailers without any industrial justification Ladhari (2009). Another study that was conducted by Zhao et al. (2002), used SERVQUAL scale for measuring SQ in the departmental stores in China, and outcome of SERVQUAL scale did not harmonize in retail sector of Mainland China properly. SERVQUAL is not suitable for retail settings due to composite nature and specific requirements of retail business settings and their customers (Martinelli and Balboni, 2012; Das et al., 2010; Vesel and Zabkar, 2010). Considering these aspects, lack of measurement scales particularly addressed to measure SQ in retailing, Dabholkar et al. (1996) introduced to retailers a validated specific scale that is called Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS). Dabholkar et al. (1996) filled critical and significant gap in context of service marketing. Authors developed and empirically validated the RSQS. Model consists of 28-item and 17 of them have been adapted from SERVQUAL, and other items have been developed by their literature review, phenomenological interviews, exploratory depth interviews and qualitative research. Dabholkar et al. (1996) proposed RSQS has hierarchical factor structure comprising five basic dimensions as physical aspects, personal interaction, policy, problem solving, and service reliability.

Reliability

According to Dabholkar et al. (1996), service reliability construct consists of mainly two dimensions that are titled as inspiring *"promises"* and *"doing it right"*. The most important reason of concentration to this construct is intangible services, which usually requires greater service reliability between customers and service providers. Therefore, service reliability has a greater impact on services than on goods (Dabholkar et al.,1996).

Our knowledge on SQ differs in comparison with the home and host culture is poor or even lacking, particularly service reliability is affected by cultural value priorities during the interaction (Ueltschy et al., 2007). There is however lack of research regarding how IC change and accordingly affect the behaviour in the context of service reliability and CS in multicultural retail environment.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is one of the most examined topics in service marketing literature. Particularly, a review from these studies, interrelationship among service evaluation, loyalty and other related topics with culture have become competitive power for the intercultural retailers (Vesel and Zabkar, 2010). For instance, CS has been found to reduce costs for attracting new customers and dealing with poor quality, defects and complaints (Michel et al., 2009). Reflecting these benefits, CS has been found to improve the long-term financial performance of firms (Williams and Naumann, 2011), have a positive impact on loyalty (Ahmad et al., 2014), be applicable predictor for purchase intention (Kuo et al., 2009), increase firm profitability (Williams and Naumann, 2011), enhances firms' market value (Ahmad et al., 2012; Kanning and Bergmann, 2009) and relationship with culture (Padma et al., 2010; Chan and Wan, 2008). Both conceptual and managerial thinking can benefit from this concentration. From former viewpoint, this study more precisely articulates these linkages and assumes that IC with R can affect the CS, specifically buying-experience of customers in multicultural atmosphere.

Interrelationship among Intercultural Communication Competence, "Reliability" and Customer Satisfaction

The role of services in world economy has increased remarkably within past decades, particularly among emerging economies. During the period of development, services

have replaced goods and probability of choosing among various suppliers gives customers greater power (Kim et al., 2010). Retail service providers must create innovative, competitive and stable marketing orientation in multicultural emerging economies, due to the complicated customers' attitudes and enlarged market share in new markets instead of saturated markets (Hutchinson et al., 2009; Ueltschy et al., 2007). Therefore, driven by recent growth pace of internationalisation of retailers, number of studies have examined and researched varying perceptions of SQ (Paswan and Ganesh, 2005), CS (Kuo et al., 2009; Reimann et al., 2008), purchase intention (Souiden and Pons, 2009; Teng and Laroche, 2007), loyalty (Omar and Musa, 2011), ISEs (Kong and Jogaratman, 2007; Sizoo et al., 2005) and related topics in unanimously context of culture.

The rationale of these studies in various areas within context of intercultural marketing is analysing and improving applicable strategies for the retailers in the multicultural society (Chan and Wan, 2008). Cognitive deductions of several implementations in practical and/or theoretical fields of these studies have proposed that intercultural topics are becoming a significant construct in service marketing literature, specifically in emerging economies (Ihtiyar et al., 2014; Ahmad et al., 2014; Wang and Mattila, 2011; Souiden and Pons, 2009). Although service marketing literature that investigated impact of culture on CS, interrelationship among a construct of SQ, CS and IC has conventionally received relatively little examine consideration (Mueller and Lockshin, 2008). Moreover, when cultures or countries differ in behaviour, culture may be integrated into theoretical and empirical research of diffusion models so that it can be evidenced that different cultural settings create highly conspicuous differences in customer behaviour (Shekarchizadeh et al., 2011). In terms of these perspectives, present study conducts a research to relate intercultural communication competence, service reliability and its impact on customer satisfaction. Thus, following hypothesis are developed:

Hypothesis 1. Service reliability is significantly and positively related to customer satisfaction.
Hypothesis 2. Intercultural communication competence is significantly and positively related to service reliability.
Hypothesis 3. Intercultural communication competence is significantly and positively related to customer satisfaction.

Grocery Retail Industry of Malaysia

According to the last census in 2010 (Statistics Department of Malaysia, 2010), Malaysia's population was 28.3 million, and Malaysia was the 17th crowded country throughout Asia and the 42nd most crowded country in the World. Over 60 per cent of population is regarded as middle-income customers, and poverty has virtually been eliminated. Over 70 per cent of population now lives in urban areas (Cottrell, 2010). These figures might be a deductive and explicable reason for investing in food retail industry of Malaysia by global players (Moklish et al., 2009). However, the market has not been identified as "*easy in or easy out*". Malaysia's grocery retail industry has highly dynamic and competitive market structure.

Furthermore, well-know global players such as Carrefour (26 Branches-cooperated with Aeon), AEON-JUSCO (19) and Tesco (45), have been challenging domestic brands such as Mydin (94) and Giant (147) etc. and they have been creating new strategies for increasing their market share against the domestics retailers in the market. According to (PWC, 2011), turnover of the sector has increased up to $54 billion dollars in 2010, from $48 billion in 2009. Furthermore, expected growth rate between 2010 and 2012 is between 5 per cent and 6 per cent, respectively. As in world, growth rate of retail industry in Malaysia will be represented an increase in coming years, and annual expected growth rate of the industry is 3.7 per cent and 3.8 per cent per annual in 2013-2014, respectively (PWC, 2011).

Methodology

The study examines the impact of intercultural communication competence on reliability and customer satisfaction in grocery retail outlets in Klang Valley, Malaysia. Empirical study was using self-administered questionnaires for collecting data from Malaysian respondents. From population, among the sample for the study was selected on convenience sampling (Huddleston et al., 2009). Several reminders were sent at monthly intervals to potential respondents, in order to improve the response rate. Only 227 usable feedbacks were received by before the deadline and about eight of returned surveys were not appropriate for further analysis. This represented about 73.24 per cent of total 299 invitations, which were sent by e-mail.

Likert-type scale was applied in previous studies to the questionnaire design, running from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high) (Qin and Prybutok, 2009). Before distribution of the questionnaire, a pilot test was performed for normality check, readability,

accuracy, comprehensiveness and further item purifications appropriately. Based on pre-test feedbacks, few items were reworded for a comfortable length of time reading and answering the survey. The Cronbach's α coefficient was used to determine the questionnaire service reliability, due to the items that were used to form a scale (Likert scale), construction at the group level and service reliability of each item at the individual level has to be evaluated. An exceeding 0.9 indicates high service reliability, α between 0.9 and 0.7 indicates acceptable level of service reliability, and α below 0.35 indicates low service reliability.

Results

Characteristics of the participants are as summarised in table 3; 72.7 per cent of participants were male. In terms of income, 46.3 per cent of them had a monthly income of more than $ 1,000, 75.1 per cent had a monthly income less than $1,333, and 75.3 per cent had a monthly income of less than $1,334. In terms of education, 90.4 per cent of them had a degree, 8.2 per cent of them had a diploma, and 1.30 per cent had a high school education. More than 58 per cent of them are Malay, 5.90 per cent of participants are Chinese, 7.3 per cent are Indian, and percentage of others was five. The participant who were represented 78.5 per cent of them purchase maximum five times in a month, and more than 41 per cent of them are paying between $34-$66 for purchasing at one time.

Table 2. Demographic Indicators

Gender	Age	Education	Ethnicity	Income	Purchasing Amount at One Time	Frequency of Purchasing
Male (72.7%)	20-24 (16.9 %)	High School (1.4 %)	Malay (58.9 %)	<RM 1999 (11.0 %)	<RM 99 (29.7 %)	0-5 (78.5 %)
Female (27.3%)	25-29 (46.1 %)	Diploma (8.2 %)	Chinese (5.9 %)	RM 2000- RM 2999 (42.5 %)	RM100-RM 199 (41.1 %)	6-9 (16.5 %)
	30-34 (19.2 %)	Degree (90.4 %)	Indian (7.3 %) Middle East (5.5 %)		RM200-RM 299 (20.1 %) RM 300< (9.1 %)	10-14 (3.2 %) 15< (1.8 %)

	35-39 (11.4 %)		Europe (17.4.5 %)	RM 3000- RM 3999 (21.9 %)		
	40-44 (3.2 %)		Others (5 %)			
	45 and above (3.2 %)			RM 4000< (24.7%)		

Author's own work

The theory assessment of SEM analysis for the model is based on revised number of items, as in table 3, after removing those with weak factor loading scores from confirmatory factor analysis (CFA).

Table 3. Items and its Sources.

Questions	Sources
Service Reliability	
(R1) Performs the service right the first time. (R2) Providing services on time that it is promising to do so. (R3) Availability of merchandise. (R4) Error-free sales transaction and record.	Dabholkar et al. (1996)
Consumer Satisfaction	
(CS1) This store has good quality merchandise. (CS2) This store offers products with excellent features. (CS3) This store has the right merchandise selection. (CS4) This store provides a good value for money.	Huddleston et al. (2009); Moliner et al. (2007); Pappua and Questerb (2006)
Intercultural Communication Competence	
(IC1) I am comfortable to staff who is of different ethnicity than mine. (IC2) I think the store is well associated and adapted to local culture.	Sharma, et al. (2012) Briones et al. (2009) Dodd (1998)

(IC3) I usually handle culture transitions very well. (IC4) The store staffs behave accordingly within their expected role.	

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy, Bartlett's test of Sphericity and Cronbach α test for reliability are conducted and represented in table 4.

Table 4. Factor Analysis and Cronbach α

Constructs	Bartlett's Test			KMO	Cronbach α
Service Reliability	$\chi 2$= 386,906	df=6	Sig.<0.001	0.776	0.839
Customer Satisfaction	$\chi 2$=424,800	df=6	Sig.<0.001	0.825	0.871
Intercultural communication	$\chi 2$=263,229	df=6	Sig.<0.001	0.787	0.748
Overall					0.887

Table 5 indicates the standardised loadings scores of each variable of the latent constructs and good fit indices for CFA analysis, to warrant the appropriateness to proceed with structural measurement. Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.971 and Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.962 reveal good fit of incremental index for this analysis, while Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) of 0.056 represents satisfactory absolute fit index.

Table 5. Regression Weights and Other Statistics

Items			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
R	<---	IC	0.729	0.116	6.296	***
CS	<---	R	0.220	0.071	4.122	***
CS	<---	IC	0.725	0.117	6.188	***
R1	<---	R	1.000			
R2	<---	R	0.987	0.069	14.247	***
R3	<---	R	0.881	0.074	11.861	***
R4	<---	R	0.873	0.092	9.453	***
IC1	<---	IC	1.000			
IC2	<---	IC	1.109	0.128	8.689	***
IC3	<---	IC	0.908	0.122	7.444	***
CS1	<---	CS	1.000			
CS2	<---	CS	1.032	0.073	14.047	***
CS3	<---	CS	0.940	0.076	12.385	***
CS4	<---	CS	0.873	0.076	11.456	***
IC4	<---	IC	0.968	0.136	7.119	***
Chi Square= 86.256						
df=51						
p=0.001						
CFI=0.971						
TLI=0.962						
RMSEA=0.056						

Structural Equation Modelling

According to Hair et al. (2010), the fit analysis must include one incremental index and one absolute index in addition to chi-square χ^2 value and the associated freedom degree. Figure 1 indicates the fitted research model that represents acceptable goodness-of-fit indices, estimates of standardised parameters and significant values.

As indicated in the model, chi-square χ^2 is significant with ratio of χ^2 / df. The TLI incremental fit index, the CFI goodness of fit index and RMSEA absolute fit index also performed perfectly for structural model.

Figure 1. Structural Equation Model on Intercultural Communication Competence, Customer Satisfaction and Reliability
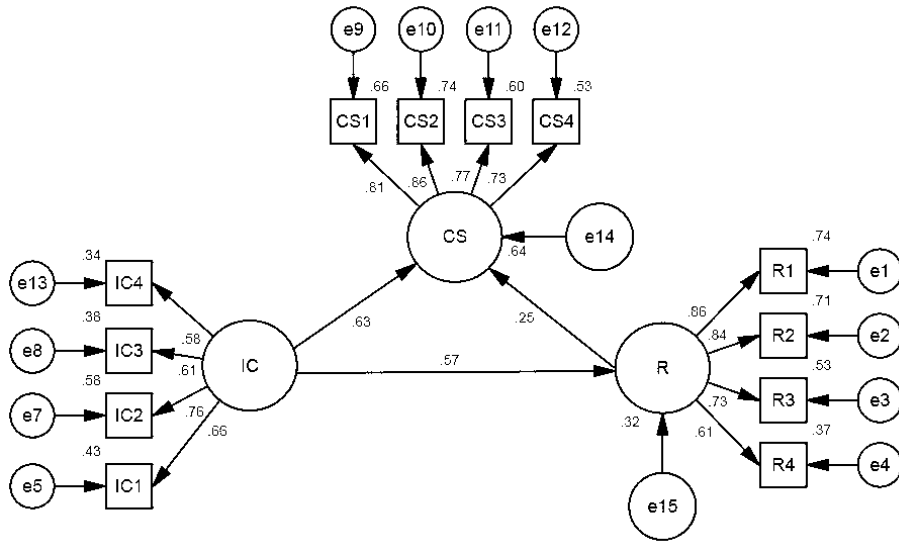
The path coefficients in table 5 represent that intercultural communication competence has statistically a significant relationship with service reliability and customer satisfaction. Service reliability also remarkably affects customer satisfaction, while intercultural communication competence has significant relationship with customer satisfaction; therefore, H1, H2, and H3, were accepted. In this study, H1 where R was a positive determinant of CS with standardized coefficients as 0.246, meaning that when R goes up by one standard deviation, CS up by 0.246 standard deviations. For H2 IC was a positive determinant of R with coefficient is 0. 569. The least significant path is at H3 where IC was a positive determinant of CS with a coefficient of 0.632.

Table 6. Standardized Regression Weight Estimates

Description	Estimate
IC→ R	0.569
IC→CS	0.632
R→CS	0.246

Conclusion

The fundamental objective of this study is to present and examine relationships of theoretical model among intercultural communication competence, service reliability, and customer satisfaction. The integrated framework presented in the study postulated that intercultural communication competence effects on customer satisfaction directly. The model also assumed that intercultural communication competence has positive relationship with customer satisfaction and service reliability. According to results, represented relationships were provided in.

Several studies have considered significance of cultural issues in service marketing context (Sharma et al., 2012; Baker et al., 2009; Reimann et al., 2008; Kong and Jogaratman, 2007). However, empirical examinations on role of intercultural communication competence in customers' evaluations of service experiences remain limited in service marketing literature. This study has concentrated in sufficiency by proposing and testing a theoretical model of interrelationships among service reliability, customer satisfaction, and intercultural communication competence. Future studies could advance the knowledge regarding other dimensions of service quality by testing and refining the proposed model in other service settings. Furthermore, examining other dimensions may assist and encourage the model generalizability.

The findings of the present study have several implications for forthcoming investigation in theoretical and managerial fields. First, as noted above, future studies could test both the direct and indirect influences of intercultural communication competence on service reliability and customer satisfaction in different service settings or industries. Second, it is apparent that the role of intercultural communication competence in service experience may create great interest to researchers and practitioners. Third, results of present study suggest that other dimensions of perceived service quality may be included in future studies, in terms of managerial and theoretical implications. The major managerial implication from present study is that, evaluations of service experience may include reference to intercultural communication competence of service experience in addition to the traditional cognitive evaluation (that is, "perceived service quality"). Majority of grocery retailers ask customers for cognitive feedback on a variety of service dimensions without recording positive and/or negative feelings that customers have experienced during their shopping in the store. Second, as practitioners are well aware, employees play a significant role in determining delivery of services during

interaction with their customers. Practitioners may improve level of education and sequence of training activities for their staff particularly frontline staff, such as cashiers, sales persons, to ensure that their staffs are completely and precisely aware of importance of monitoring and managing interaction properly in all service encounters. The study is also providing comprehensive outcomes for re-assessment of service quality with culture as a dimension in Malaysian retail industry.

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