

Review of *Intercultural Service Encounters: Cross-cultural Interactions and Service Quality*, Edited by Piyush Sharma, Switzerland, Springer, 2019, pp. vii+101, €54,99 (hbk), ISBN 978-3-319-91940-9; €46 (ebk), ISBN 978-3-319-91941-6

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Since the 1990s, globalization has aroused people's attention constantly. Meanwhile, with more and more immigrants, migrant workers, international students, foreign tourists, and business people, cross-cultural interaction has increased dramatically. Consequently, the communication and interaction between service employees and customers from different cultural backgrounds is getting frequent. Services have gotten great profits from the phenomenon which is known as intercultural service encounters (ICSE). For one who has contributed a lot to ICSE, Piyush Sharma in his book *Intercultural Service Encounters: Cross-cultural Interactions and Service Quality* attempts to concentrate on some significant factors closely related to ICSE, from the perspective of service employees. Account for Piyush Sharma's novel view on the relationship of employees and customers in the process of ICSE, here is a review of his work. For each part of Piyush Sharma's volume, this review gives readers a brief and concise summary, which is followed by comprehensive comments of the reviewer. This review is a good guidance and introduction for those who are interested in ICSE and those who major in foreign languages and marketing management to have a good command of Piyush Sharma's volume.

Keywords: cross-cultural interactions, intercultural service encounters, service quality

With a rapid rise in the globalization of the world's economy in the last few decades, the number of people who go abroad for migration, travel and business has grown exponentially (Tam et al., 2016). Consequently, interactions between service employees and customers from different cultural backgrounds are becoming prevalent. Service businesses have gotten great profits from such a phenomenon which is known as intercultural service encounters (ICSE). For one who has contributed a lot to ICSE, Piyush Sharma in his book *Intercultural Service Encounters: Cross-cultural Interactions and Service Quality* attempts to concentrate on some significant factors closely related to ICSE, from the perspective of service employees. This volume is intended for novice researchers and students of marketing and foreign languages by providing them with an exhaustive

literature review in the field of ICSE and ideas for reconsidering theories that drive intercultural interactions. Thus, it is valuable for those who are interested in ICSE to have a good command of its dominating topics.

The book is composed of four chapters. The introductory part offers an overview of what facilitates ICSE and what ICSE investigates. It starts with the latest demographic trends under the cross-cultural backgrounds around the world, especially in economic-developed areas. The author highlights the necessity and significance of dealing with conflicts and promoting positive outcomes during the process of ICSE. Meanwhile, this volume offers readers some useful ideas for the identification of some study-worthy gaps for further research.

Chapter 2 gives a detailed guide for learning ICSE from the theoretical dimension. In this chapter, the author discusses state-of-the-art research on ICSE systematically including intercultural communication, intercultural competence, intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adjustment. Such discussion contributes to deepening readers' understanding of the relations among these abstract concepts. The theoretical research mentioned above have originated in a fact increasingly drawing scholars' attention, which is that people may face endless cultural differences when experiencing intercultural interactions and cross-cultural adjustment. And this is the reason why the author stresses that one should develop his intercultural competence if he desires active and positive intercultural interactions. Additionally, the author describes four theories concerning intercultural perceptions and behaviors which have been used to analyze intercultural interactions, including the similarity-attraction paradigm, social identity theory, role theory, and attribution theory. Meaningfully, these fundamental theories can be regarded as step stones for foreign language learners to research on second language acquisition (SLA), teaching assessment and more specific fields of applied linguistics.

This book provides an in-depth analysis of significant factors which can influence ICSE in Chapter 3. The author divides customers into two types, individualistic customers and collectivistic customers. Such classification can illustrate the reasons clearly why cross-cultural differences in service encounters can shape customer's expectations and evaluations. Following this part, the author secondly proposes that there should have been more research investigating intercultural service encounters. It is apparent that there are great differences between intracultural service encounters and intercultural service encounters in which customers and employees have considerably diverse cultural values. Nevertheless, successful and satisfactory ICSE outcomes are more likely contributed by customers and employees who have similar cultural values. Early research from 1999 to 2007 mentioned in this part shows readers that more researchers, especially those in increasingly diverse market places, have shifted their attention to ICSE. However, some research lacks a comprehensive framework with necessary theoretical support and inadequate attention to the employees' point of view. By contrast, the author reveals conceptual frameworks and models developed by him and other researchers to illustrate ICSE which provoke a rethinking of some significant factors that are familiar to foreign language learners.

Undoubtedly, the most remarkable feature of this book is the establishment and improvement of ICSE frameworks by Sharma et al. in Chapter 3. There are eight conceptual frameworks, including the original ICSE framework (2009), the extended framework of ICSE (2012), the cultural attribution framework (2014), service role framework (2015) and service outcome framework (2015), ICSE dual framework (2015), ICSE attributions framework (2016), and PCO (personal cultural orientations) framework (2016). Overall, these frameworks analyze the correlations among a wide variety of variables in the process of ICSE. Just as I suppose, lower perceived cultural distance and higher inter-role congruence (ICR) can promote interaction comfort which in turn

could result in a more favorable perceived service level. Furthermore, there are different correlations between ICR and adequate service level from the perspective of customers and employees. Applying the correlations among these variables to practice appropriately can facilitate service satisfaction. Moreover, this part offers two insightful models, the service climate model (2017) and the service employees acculturation model (2017) to identify how internal service quality mediates the impact of service climate and how ethnic majority frontline service employees' acculturation behaviors make a difference on the satisfaction and commitment of their ethnic minority customers. The author and his partners have made great efforts to shift present research focus on ICSE from the perspective of customers to service employees, which guides readers to realize the same significance of these two perspectives and encourages readers to integrate them when analyzing ICSE issues.

Despite the original ICSE framework, another distinctive feature of these frameworks and models is using empirical research methods including but not limited to field experiments, laboratory experiments, in-depth interviews and scenario-based quasi-experiments to test the hypothesized relationships convincingly and discuss their conceptual contributions as well as managerial implications.

Finally, the book identifies several gaps and unanswered questions in the field of ICSE in Chapter 4. In response to the weaknesses of present research, this book provides scholars with a wider geographical range, which means that there should be more studies covering Europe, South America, Africa and Middle East rather than limited to the Asia-Pacific region and North America. It also gives researchers inspiration for using more methods close to the real-life experiences of customers and employees to make their arguments more credible, and for concentrating more on new technologies and platforms for communication between customers and service providers. Additionally, it offers readers some other useful directions in the future: diversified research objects and the impact of situational factors including time pressure, involvement level and interaction contexts in ICSE. At the end of this chapter, the author discusses some important managerial implications which suggest that service firms improve their employees' intercultural competence and use customer education when it is necessary to build steadier, stronger and more profitable relations with both customers and employees.

This volume can be recommended for several reasons. On the one hand, it makes a comprehensive and exhaustive review of previous and current literature on ICSE, from which readers can easily grasp the development of this field and acquire primary knowledge concerning ICSE. On the other hand, this volume illustrates correlations among the diverse and abstract variables in the process of ICSE clearly by building and refining the conceptual frameworks and models in Chapter 3. With reasonable arrangement of quantitative data from empirical studies, the explanations of these conceptual issues are credible and logical. Personally speaking, if there are explicit marks of positive and negative associations on the conceptual frameworks, it will take less time for readers to make out the correlations among these variables.

Distinct from tremendous literature of antecedents emphasizing the dimension of service customers on ICSE, this book provides readers with a research focus on the perspective of service employees. It not only clearly illustrates diverse variables (perceived cultural distance, interaction comfort, inter-role congruence, adequate and perceived service levels, customer satisfaction, etc.) from the theoretical perspective, but also considers valuable managerial implications from the practical perspective, which suggest that a cross-cultural working environment should be established by service firms to give both customers and employees satisfaction during the process of

intercultural service encounters. I highly recommend the book because it serves as guidance for researchers and students in any course of intercultural interaction, and for service business managers to improve service quality.

References

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