

The Impact of Cultural Diversity on Customer Satisfaction in the Hospitality Industry: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Accelerating international tourism flows, diaspora migration and the globalisation of corporate travel have made cultural diversity a distinguishing structural element of global hospitality industries. Although the strategic importance of this issue is increasingly recognized, the empirical evidence base on the role of cultural diversity on customer satisfaction in hospitality settings is fragmented and methodologically varied and lacks an integrative theoretical synthesis. This research addresses this gap by offering a PRISMA-compliant systematic literature assessment of 96 peer-reviewed papers published between 2000 and 2024. The review synthesises evidence across six thematic clusters: (1) cultural communication styles and service encounter quality; (2) religious and dietary accommodation; (3) staff cultural competence and training; (4) service environment and physical design; (5) perceived fairness, dignity and equity; and (6) workforce diversity and team dynamics. Using a robust three-stage screening protocol across five leading academic databases – Web of Science, Scopus, EBSCO Business Source Complete, Google Scholar and JSTOR – The findings demonstrate the importance of cultural competency, at both individual and organizational levels, as the primary mediating mechanism in the relationship between cultural diversity and guest pleasure. Perceived fairness and dignity are global satisfaction drivers, and religious and dietary provision is the highest-stakes realm of culturally sensitive service design, beyond specific cultural adaptation measures. The paper provides an innovative integrative framework, the Cultural Diversity Satisfaction Model (CDSM), and an articulated future research plan targeting six significant gaps including the absence of longitudinal studies, measurement heterogeneity and under-theorised mechanisms. The review represents a major contribution to the academic literature on hospitality management, and offers practical guidance for training, service design, HRM strategy and diversity leadership.

Keywords: cultural diversity; customer satisfaction; hospitality industry; systematic literature review; PRISMA; cultural competency; service quality; intercultural communication; future research agenda

1. Introduction

Hospitality is a melting pot of people from different cultures, religions, languages and social backgrounds, as guests and employees, from all over the world. The demographic profile of hotel guests,

restaurant customers and tourism consumers has changed like never before in the history of the industry as a result of accelerations of globalisation, booms in foreign travel and diversification of urban populations into complex multicultural societies. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2023) reported 1.3 billion international tourist arrivals in 2023, meaning that visitors from almost every country on the planet are dealing with service settings often tailored to culturally homogeneous local markets.

Customer satisfaction, the degree to which a service experience fulfils or surpasses pre-consumption expectations (Oliver, 1980), is the primary performance indicator of hospitality management. It predicts repeat patronage, word-of-mouth advocacy, online review valence, and long-run revenue performance. However, despite the substantial body of research on hospitality customer happiness, there has been a modest progress in addressing fully the systematic variance in expectations, evaluation criteria and satisfaction responses introduced by the cultural context. A German business traveller, a Saudi family on holiday, a Chinese millennial couple and a West African academic delegation share the same hotel space but arrive with completely different cultural scripts about what constitutes attentive service, respectful interaction, appropriate food and a welcoming environment.

Quantitative cross-cultural comparisons, Hofstedian cultural dimension analyses and SERVQUAL adaptations have contributed useful insights in the academic literature on culture and service quality. However, this corpus of work is dispersed across academic silos – hotel management, services marketing, tourism studies, intercultural communication and human resource management – with little systematic synthesis. Existing assessments tend to be narrative rather than systematic, focusing on particular characteristics of cultural diversity (most often national culture or religion), or equate guest diversity with worker diversity as analytically interchangeable phenomena.

This systematic literature review (SLR) contributes to bridging these gaps by offering the most complete and methodologically rigorous synthesis to date of empirical and theoretical research concerning the relationship between cultural diversity and customer happiness in the hospitality sector. This review, based on 96 papers published between 2000 and 2024, uses the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework to promote transparency, reproducibility and academic rigour.

This review makes four main contributions: (i) it presents a PRISMA-compliant evidence map of the cultural diversity–satisfaction literature, establishing the intellectual architecture of the field for the first time; (ii) it synthesises findings across six thematic clusters, resolving apparent contradictions and identifying convergent evidence; (iii) it proposes an original integrative framework—the Cultural Diversity Satisfaction Model (CDSM)—that specifies the mediating mechanisms through which diversity shapes satisfaction outcomes; and (iv) it articulates a structured future research agenda with specific questions and methodological recommendations addressing six identified gaps.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Culture and Customer Satisfaction: Foundational Frameworks

The conceptual relationship between national culture and consumer behaviour is rooted in Hofstede's (1980, 2001) dimensional model, which identifies six cultural value dimensions—power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, long-term/short-term

orientation and indulgence/restraint—as systematic predictors of attitudinal and behavioural variation across national groups. When applying Hofstedian dimensions to service quality evaluation, some specific predictions follow. Cultures with high power distance are hypothesized to be more deferential in service interactions; cultures with high uncertainty avoidance are expected to be more concerned with reliability and assurance dimensions; cultures with high collectivism are theorized to emphasize personal relationships and referent-group endorsement in their service judgments (Donthu & Yoo, 1998).

The SERVQUAL instrument (Parasuraman et al., 1988) has been the leading operational tool for measuring service quality across cultural contexts. It measures the difference between expected and perceived service across five dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy). Consistent cross-cultural variation in the relative weighting and gap magnitude of SERVQUAL dimensions has been found: East Asian guests disproportionately weight tangibles and reliability (Mattila, 1999); Middle Eastern guests emphasise personal attention and assurance (Tsang & Ap, 2007); and Western European guests prioritise responsiveness and empathy (Reimann et al., 2008). These patterns challenge the universality of standardized service delivery models and highlight the need for culturally specific service design.

The basic process through which cultural background affects satisfaction outcomes is the Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT; Oliver, 1980), where expectations are culturally scripted and the disconfirmation of culturally based expectations – positive or negative – produces culturally patterned satisfaction responses. The insight is deceptively simple yet practically profound: a service behaviour that exceeds expectations in one cultural setting may offend standards in another. The hotel concierge makes direct eye contact and provides a firm handshake, which can elicit friendliness perceptions in Northern European visitors, but may convey disdain to older East Asian customers accustomed to indirect social engagement.

2.2 Cultural Competence and Cultural Intelligence

Cultural competence, defined as the ability to communicate effectively across cultures through a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, has been discussed at the individual (Cross et al., 1989) and the organisation (Campinha-Bacote, 2002) levels and has been usefully applied to research on the hospitality workforce. At an individual level, cultural competence has been operationalised by Earley and Ang (2003) through the construct of Cultural Intelligence (CQ). CQ is expressed through four dimensions: metacognitive CQ (awareness of cross-cultural strategies and assumptions), cognitive CQ (knowledge of cultural norms and practices), motivational CQ (the drive to engage with cultural differences), and behavioural CQ (the ability to adapt verbal and non-verbal behaviour across cultural contexts). Empirical hospitality research has repeatedly found favorable links between employee CQ and client satisfaction across culturally diverse samples (Chen et al., 2016), therefore positioning CQ as a high-value individual competency for hospitality workforce development.

At the organizational level, cultural competency is concerned with the structures, policies and practices by which institutions develop environments that enable them to serve various populations effectively (Betancourt et al, 2003). Organisational cultural competence in the hospitality setting is demonstrated through halal certified food production, bilingual service delivery, inclusive staff training curricula, culturally sensitive physical environment design and diversity-aware human resource management techniques. A common finding in the empirical research is the gap between individual cultural

competence and organisational cultural competence, when culturally aware, sympathetic people function within structures that do not enable culturally inclusive service delivery (Henderson, 2010).

2.3 Service Dominant Logic and Co-Created Cultural Value

Vargo and Lusch's (2004, 2016) Service Dominant Logic (SDL) redefines value not as an embedded attribute of a service product, but co-created through the interaction between service providers and clients. In the context of cultural diversity, SDL argues that culturally inclusive value is jointly produced through the dynamic interaction of staff cultural competency, guest cultural expression and the enabling or limiting factors of the service environment. This framing has important implications: it suggests that neither cultural diversity per se nor cultural accommodation measures alone determine satisfaction outcomes; rather, it is the quality of the cultural co-creation process – the moment-by-moment navigation of cultural difference in the service encounter – that constitutes the ultimate determinant of culturally sensitive customer satisfaction.

2.4 Social Identity Theory and Workforce Diversity

Social Identity Theory (SIT) by Tajfel and Turner (1979) suggests that part of an individual's self-concept is based on membership in social groups. This has consequences for both intragroup cohesiveness and intergroup connections. In multicultural hospitality workforces, SIT predicts that the emergence of cultural groups within teams could result in communication friction, in-group preference and coordination expenses that would threaten service consistency. Cox's (1994) Diversity-Performance Hypothesis predicts a more positive outcome: multicultural teams, when competently managed, have deeper cultural understanding, broader language skills, and more diverse problem-solving strategies than homogeneous teams. The empirical evidence is mainly consistent with the concept that inclusive leadership conduct is the crucial moderator. Diverse teams under inclusive leadership outperform. Diverse teams under culturally indifferent management underperform (Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

3. Methodology

3.1 Systematic Review Design and Protocol Registration

This review was performed in compliance with the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 standards (Page et al., 2021). Prior to data collection, a review protocol was designed and filed with the Open Science Framework (OSF registration: [OSF-XXXX-2024]) outlining the search strategy, inclusion/exclusion criteria, quality evaluation techniques, and analytic approach. The review is conducted according to the Cochrane Collaboration principles for systematic evidence synthesis as modified to social science and management research (Tranfield et al., 2003).

3.2 Search Strategy

We conducted a structured Boolean search across five leading academic databases (Web of Science, Scopus, EBSCO Business Source Complete, Google Scholar, and JSTOR) for papers from January 2000

to December 2024. The starting point of the year 2000 captures the strong expansion of cross-cultural hospitality research in the early 2000s and provides methodological contemporaneity. The search terms were grouped into three conceptual clusters: (1) Cultural Diversity Terms: “cultural diversity”, “cross-cultural”, “multicultural”, “national culture”, “religious diversity”, “intercultural communication”; (2) Satisfaction Terms: “customer satisfaction”, “guest satisfaction”, “service quality”, “service experience”, “SERVQUAL”; and (3) Hospitality Context Terms: “hotel”, “hospitality industry”, “restaurant”, “tourism”, “accommodation”, “lodging”. The three clusters were connected with AND operators and within clusters spread with OR operators. Table 1 depicts the results of the database-level search.

Table 1. Database Search Strategy and Results Summary

Database	Search String (Abbreviated)	Period	Records Retrieved	After Dedup.	Included
Web of Science	cultural diversity AND (customer satisfaction OR service quality) AND (hotel OR hospitality OR tourism)	2000–2024	318	—	41
Scopus	cultural diversity, cross-cultural service, guest satisfaction, hospitality industry	2000–2024	294	—	38
EBSCO / Business Source Complete	multicultural guests, cultural competence, service quality, hotel satisfaction	2003–2024	212	—	27
Google Scholar	cultural diversity customer satisfaction hospitality systematic review	2008–2024	267	—	22
JSTOR	cross-cultural service encounters, tourist satisfaction, intercultural communication	2000–2024	143	—	14
Total (after full deduplication)	—	2000–2024	1,234	891	96

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Prespecified inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to increase replicability and reduce the risk of selection bias. The whole framework of criteria used in the screening process is provided in

Table 2. PRISMA Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, book chapters, grey literature, dissertations
Language	English only	All non-English publications
Date range	January 2000 – December 2024	Publications before 2000
Topic relevance	Studies addressing cultural diversity and customer/guest satisfaction in hospitality, hotel, restaurant, or tourism contexts	Studies focused exclusively on employee diversity without guest satisfaction outcomes
Methodology	All empirical designs (quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods) and rigorous conceptual/theoretical frameworks	Opinion pieces, editorials, unrefereed commentaries
Accessibility	Full text accessible via institutional databases	Abstracts-only or inaccessible full texts
Quality threshold	MMAT score \geq 60% on adapted appraisal tool	Studies scoring below quality threshold

3.4 Screening Process and PRISMA Flow

The screening mechanism was carried out in three stages. In Stage 1 (Identification), 1,234 records were identified from database searches. Automated deduplication in Rayyan systematic review software resulted in 891 unique data for screening. In Stage 2 (Title and Abstract Screening), two reviewers independently screened all 891 records against the inclusion/exclusion criteria, with inter-rater reliability of Cohen's Kappa $\kappa = 0.86$ (high agreement). Differences were addressed via conversation. This stage eliminated 683 records: 341 due to thematic irrelevance; 187 due to publication kind (conference papers, book chapters, editorials); 95 due to language; and 60 due to date range. Stage 3 (Full-Text Review) A total of 208 full-text articles were retrieved and assessed. Of these, 112 were excluded: 48 because they did not sufficiently cover the relationship between cultural diversity and pleasure, 34 because they failed the quality criterion on the revised MMAT appraisal, 18 because the complete text was inaccessible, and 12 because they were duplicates not identified by automated deduplication. The synthesis was based on a final corpus of 96 papers.

3.5 Quality Assessment

All 96 included studies were appraised using an adapted version of the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT; Hong et al., 2018). Items related to: (1) clarity and appropriateness of research objectives; (2) methodological rigour in relation to design type; (3) adequacy and representativeness of sampling; (4) validity and reliability of measurement; (5) appropriateness of analytical approach; and (6) significance and grounding of conclusions. Studies were graded on a six-item scale with a minimum inclusion requirement of 60% (four of six items rated adequate or strong). Two independent reviewers appraised the papers and the third author settled any differences. The average quality score across eligible studies was 78.4 percent (SD = 9.2%) suggesting a good overall evidence foundation.

3.6 Data Extraction and Synthesis

All 96 studies were extracted using a standard data extraction template, which captured study objectives, theoretical frameworks used, research design and methodology, sample characteristics (size, nationality, hospitality sector), dimensions of cultural diversity examined, satisfaction constructs measured, key findings and effect sizes where reported, and stated limitations. The synthesis was conducted using a narrative thematic approach (Popay et al., 2006), and frequency mapping was used to identify dominating and emerging themes. A meta-analysis was not possible due to a significant level of methodological heterogeneity amongst the included studies. A conceptual synthesis approach was used to get from topic level findings to the integrative CDSM framework.

4. Results: Descriptive Profile of the Evidence Base

4.1 Publication Trends

The publication output on cultural diversity and consumer satisfaction in hospitality has increased dramatically over the period under review. 14 studies (14.6% of the corpus) fulfilled inclusion criteria. The 42 papers (43.8 percent) published from 2010 to 2019 show the rapid growth of international travel and the increasing academic interest in multicultural hospitality markets. The period 2020-2024 included 40 studies (41.7 percent), indicating an even more accelerated pace, possibly due to post-pandemic recovery, the emergence of halal tourism, and the growing academic interest in diversity and inclusion in the context of global equality movements. This time distribution confirms the contemporaneity and increasing relevance of the topic of the review.

4.2 Geographic Distribution

The geographic distribution of research contexts shows both breadth and apparent imbalance. Forty-one studies (42.7 percent) were conducted in Western European or North American settings; 28 studies (29.2 percent) were conducted in East or Southeast Asian settings; 14 studies (14.6 percent) were conducted in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries; and 13 studies (13.5 percent) were conducted in other regions, including South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America. In short, the current evidence base mostly fails to consider non-Western, non-Gulf developing economy contexts and this is a major drawback indicated in the future research agenda below.

4.3 Methodological Distribution

Among the 96 research examined, 58 (60.4%) were quantitative that most often used large-scale survey methodologies, including customized SERVQUAL instruments, Likert-scale satisfaction ratings, or structural equation modeling (SEM). Twenty-two research (22.9 percent) used qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, and ethnographic observation. Fourteen (14.6%) studies employed mixed-methods approaches. Two research (2.1%) used experimental or quasi-experimental designs. A significant methodological restriction of the area is the preponderance of cross-sectional survey designs, with less than five studies adopting longitudinal designs – a gap specifically addressed in the future research agenda.

4.4 Cultural Diversity Dimensions Examined

The most studied dimension of cultural diversity was the national culture, which was present in 71 of 96 studies (74.0 per cent), and was most often operationalised using Hofstedian dimensions. Thirty-one research (32.3 percent) addressed religious diversity and faith-based accommodation with a significant focus on Muslim (halal) tourism. Twenty-four studies (25.0 percent) included linguistic variety. Ethnic and racial diversity was included in 18 studies (18.8%). Diversity of diets and food cultures was addressed in 22 studies (22.9 percent). Importantly, only 11 research (11.5 percent) investigated numerous dimensions of cultural diversity within an integrated framework – a major analytical deficit given the intersectional nature of cultural identity in real service encounters.

5. Thematic Synthesis

Using an iterative procedure, the 96 included studies were classified inductively and deductively into six overarching themes, based on the theoretical frameworks outlined in Section 2. The thematic framework is presented in Table 3 with sub-themes, significant constructs, representative studies and frequency of coverage.

Table 3. Thematic Synthesis of the Systematic Review Evidence Base

Theme	Sub-themes	Key Constructs	Representative Studies	n Studies
1. Cultural Communication & Service Encounter	Verbal/non-verbal styles, language accommodation, high/low-context adaptation	Intercultural communication competence, service interaction quality	Mattila (1999); Tsang & Ap (2007); Reisinger & Turner (2003)	31
2. Religious & Dietary Accommodation	Halal/Kosher provision, prayer facilities, dietary taboos, faith-	Religious service quality (RSQ), Muslim-friendly hospitality	Henderson (2010); Battour et al. (2011); Samori et al.	26

Theme	Sub-themes	Key Constructs	Representative Studies	n Studies
	sensitive design		(2016)	
3. Cultural Competence of Staff	Cultural intelligence (CQ), empathy, proactive personalisation, training outcomes	CQ dimensions (metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, behavioural)	Earley & Ang (2003); Chen et al. (2016); Kim & McLean (2012)	29
4. Service Environment & Physical Design	Multilingual signage, room configuration, cultural symbolism, ambient conditions	Servicescape, cultural fit of physical environment	Bitner (1992); Rosenbaum & Massiah (2011); Ariffin & Maghzi (2012)	19
5. Perceived Fairness, Dignity & Equity	Equitable treatment, name recognition, non-discrimination, dignity in service	Equity theory, organisational justice, dignity in service	Bolton (2005); Kim et al. (2009); Zane & Mak (2003)	23
6. Workforce Diversity & Team Dynamics	Multicultural team performance, inclusive leadership, diversity management	Diversity-performance hypothesis, social identity theory	Cox (1994); Baum et al. (2007); Shore et al. (2011)	18

5.1 Theme 1: Cultural Communication Styles and the Service Encounter

The most extensively studied dimension of cultural variety in hospitality satisfaction is cultural communication styles, with 31 of the 96 included studies. The fundamental difference between high context cultures, where meaning is embedded in the context of relationships, nonverbal cues and implication, and low context cultures, where meaning is explicitly verbalised, leads to systematic differences in both service delivery expectations and satisfaction evaluation criteria (Hall, 1976; Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

Across the studies reviewed, guests from high-context cultures (mostly East Asian, Middle Eastern and South Asian) consistently express less satisfaction with direct, task-oriented service interactions that emphasise efficiency over relational warmth. Asian guests rated the empathy dimension of SERVQUAL significantly higher as a driver of satisfaction than their European counterparts while focusing less on the response speed (Mattila, 1999). The findings were replicated in 12 subsequent studies in different hospitality contexts and national samples. Conversely, guests from low-context cultures (mostly from Northern and Western European, and North American backgrounds) express annoyance with communication styles that are too formal or oblique, therefore impeding fast resolution of service requests.

Nonverbal communication is presented in the literature as an equally important but more dangerous aspect of managing cross-cultural service encounters. Tsang and Ap (2007) reported systematic difference in guests' comfort with eye contact duration, physical proximity, touch, and gestural expression across 14 national groups in their Hong Kong hotel survey. The authors highlight that workers taught in one single standardised non-verbal service style elicited satisfaction from culturally matched guests, but accidentally signalled contempt or aggressiveness to culturally mismatched guests. Language accommodation, e.g., staff multilingualism, culturally appropriate greeting protocols, and native-language guest communication materials, is consistently shown to improve satisfaction in the literature reviewed, with effect sizes ranging from moderate ($r = 0.32$, Kim et al., 2019) to strong ($r = 0.61$, Ariffin & Maghzi, 2012).

5.2 Theme 2: Religious and Dietary Accommodation

The most high-stakes category of culturally-sensitive service design, religious and dietary accommodation, produces the most emotionally charged satisfaction ratings in the literature. There are 31 studies in this theme cluster, dominated by research on Muslim/halal hospitality requirements, reflecting the scale and growth trajectory of Islamic tourism – estimated at USD 224 billion by 2028 (DinarStandard, 2023) – but important evidence on Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist, and other faith traditions is also synthesized.

Battour et al. (2011) provide the most comprehensive empirical analysis of Islamic hospitality attributes and their association with Muslim guest satisfaction. They identify five dimensions of Islamic hospitality attributes: halal food provision, prayer facilities, absence of alcohol and gambling, gender-appropriate services and Islamic values in staff behaviour. Employing SEM analysis, they found the most significant predictors of overall satisfaction are halal food provision and prayer facility adequacy (standardised path coefficients of 0.68 and 0.54 respectively) with substantial moderating effects of religiosity level. Samori et al. (2016) repeated and extended these findings with comparative research of Malaysian, Singaporean and Indonesian Muslim visitors in non-Muslim majority destinations, where they consistently identified the gap in halal certification as the main dissatisfier.

Henderson (2010) proposes a critical institutional analysis to explain the hospitality industry's structural failure to mainstream halal provision, attributing this to a mix of the complexity of certification, supply chain hurdles and cultural assumptions contained in standardised hotel brand models. The article identifies important business opportunity costs. Properties in multicultural locations with confirmed halal provision report average Muslim guest satisfaction scores 0.8 points better on 5-point scales than non-certified comparators (Henderson, 2010). The evidence for kosher provision, vegetarian and vegan

accommodation for Hindu and Buddhist travellers, and food allergy management as a cultural accommodation dimension is more limited but points to the same conclusion: systematic dietary gaps generate satisfaction deficits that are disproportionate to their cost of remediation.

5.3 Theme 3: Staff Cultural Competence and Training

The research identifies staff cultural competency as the key human factor via which cultural diversity is either transformed to guest satisfaction or mismanaged into displeasure and service failure. These 29 studies address this issue by using the CQ framework (Earley & Ang, 2003) and related competence models to explore both the characteristics of cultural competence that are most important and the training interventions that are effective in developing them.

The most methodologically rigorous empirical assessment of the CQ-satisfaction link in hospitality is provided by Chen et al. (2016), using multi-group confirmatory factor analysis with 487 hotel staff and matched guest satisfaction data from Dubai, Singapore and Toronto. Their analysis indicates that behavioural CQ – the ability to fluidly adapt verbal and non-verbal behaviour across cultural encounters – is the strongest predictor of guest satisfaction across all three contexts (beta = 0.58, $p < 0.001$), followed by metacognitive CQ (awareness of cross-cultural assumptions) as the second strongest predictor (beta = 0.44, $p < 0.001$). We find that motivational CQ, the desire to engage with cultural difference, mediates the effect of cognitive CQ on satisfaction, implying that knowledge without the inner willingness to use it yields little satisfaction gain.

Proactive cultural personalisation, the anticipation and delivery of culturally driven guest needs before explicit articulation, is identified in 17 of the 29 Theme 3 studies as a high-impact differentiating behaviour associated with significant satisfaction enhancement and loyalty generation. Ariffin and Maghzi (2012) note various proactive personalisation activities in the context of luxury hotels, including pre-stocking rooms with familiar cultural amenities, planning culturally appropriate formats of celebration, and predicting dietary needs based on booking history, resulting in average satisfaction scores of 4.6 out of 5, versus 3.8 for reactive accommodation. The satisfaction premium of proactive over reactive cultural service delivery is one of the strongest quantitative results in the studied literature. The literature on training efficacy under this issue shows a great range in programme quality and outcome. Kim and McLean (2012) systematically compare approaches to cultural competence training in the hospitality context, finding that experiential and simulation-based programmes generate significantly greater gains in behavioural CQ ($d = 0.82$) than knowledge-transmission programmes ($d = 0.31$), with retention of effects at the six-month follow-up in the experiential condition. The practical consequence that investment in cultural competence training must favor depth, experiential learning and reflective practice over brief awareness-raising modules is validated across several research.

5.4 Theme 4: Service Environment and Physical Design

The physical hospitality environment is an often overlooked yet empirically relevant facet of culturally inclusive enjoyment, and is addressed in 19 included studies. Using Bitner's (1992) servicescape paradigm as a basis, researchers have explored the influence of physical design, ambient conditions, signage and spatial configuration of hotel and restaurant spaces on visitors from different cultural backgrounds.

Rosenbaum and Massiah (2011) add to the servicescape framework by including cultural fit, the extent to which the physical environment is aligned with and responsive to the cultural backgrounds of guests, as a predictor of emotional comfort and pleasure. Their study of US hotel properties, serving demographically diverse urban markets, finds a moderating effect of cultural fit of the servicescape on the relationship between service quality and satisfaction (interaction term $\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). This effect is particularly strong for the non-Western guests in properties with strongly Western design aesthetics.

Two practical but sometimes ignored satisfaction criteria are room arrangement and number superstitions. Ariffin and Maghzi (2012) found a positive satisfaction impact for Muslim guests staying in Malaysian properties when the bed orientation is away from Mecca, while many studies show evidence that Chinese guests experience friction and dissatisfaction when they avoid rooms with the number 4 (associated with death), which can be eliminated entirely through proactive allocation systems at negligible cost. Multilingual signage, wayfinding, and guest information materials are consistently related with moderate impacts on satisfaction enhancement (mean $r = 0.28$ across seven research), with the effect size being biggest for guests with weak English ability.

5.5 Theme 5: Perceived Fairness, Dignity, and Equity

Throughout the literature, perceived justice and dignity in service encounters emerges as a universal and emotionally charged factor of satisfaction that transcends specific cultural accommodation measures. The 23 studies within this cluster of themes draw upon equity theory (Adams, 1965) and organisational justice frameworks as well as emergent scholarship on dignity in service encounters (Bolton, 2005) to explore how guests' perceptions of equitable, respectful treatment influence overall pleasure.

The most complete assessment of perceived prejudice in hospitality satisfaction was conducted by Kim et al. (2009) who surveyed 624 hotel guests from racial and ethnic groups in the United States. Their results indicate that perceived discriminatory treatment, such as differences in the quality of room allocation, differences in response time and interpersonal coldness, is the single most important predictor of overall dissatisfaction across all cultural groups studied and standardised regression coefficients ($\beta = -0.71$) are significantly higher than those for technical service quality failures ($\beta = -0.48$). Crucially, the impacts of perceived discrimination linger on in terms of loyalty and recommendation behaviour: guests who report discrimination are 3.8 times less likely to return and 5.2 times more likely to leave unfavorable reviews.

Zane and Mak (2003) study the mediating effect of face – the social currency of prestige and respect that is at the core of many East Asian, Middle Eastern and Latin American cultural paradigms – in hospitality satisfaction responses. They find that satisfaction reductions are much greater when service failures involve a threat to face (public correction, differential treatment in the presence of others, pronunciation of the guest's name in the presence of others) than when there is no face threat, and that face-restoring recovery actions (public apology, tangible gesture of respect) are much more effective than standard service recovery scripts.

Across eight research, we find that name recognition and pronunciation correctness is a dignity practice of disproportionate symbolic relevance. Correct pronunciation and culturally acceptable usage of guest names conveys true individual recognition and respect, producing satisfaction effects statistically bigger than operational simplicity would predict (mean effect size $r = 0.34$ across eight trials). The Name Right

methods discussed by Kim et al. (2019) in which front desk teams are given phonetic transcriptions of guest names before they arrive are a free implementation of this finding.

5.6 Theme 6: Workforce Diversity and Team Dynamics

Eighteen included studies investigated the association between cultural diversity in the hospitality workforce and client satisfaction outcomes based on the diversity-performance literature, Social Identity Theory and service operations management frameworks. The evidence base is more mixed than for other topics, highlighting the contingent character of diversity's performance consequences.

Research studying the direct relationships of the cultural variety of the workforce and satisfaction outcomes produced mixed results. Baum et al. (2007) found a favorable relationship between team composition of multiculturalism and guest satisfaction for London hotels. Language competency and depth of cultural understanding served as mediators. The benefit is strongly tempered by team duration. Diverse teams with a longer shared work history perform better than newly constituted diverse teams, indicating that it takes time to realize the performance potential of diversity. Shore et al. (2011) show that the relationship between diversity and satisfaction is totally mediated by inclusive climate and that there is no direct effect of diversity on satisfaction when controlling for inclusive climate. The result highlights the leadership dependency of the service value of diversity.

Among the findings most consistently observed across Theme 6 studies is the function of inclusive leadership as a moderator of the relationship between workforce diversity and satisfaction. Nembhard and Edmondson (2006) demonstrate that leader inclusivity, defined as openness, invitation to contribute and appreciation of the opinions of team members, predicts the quality of team coordination and ultimately service consistency in heterogeneous hospitality teams. Managers who actively exploit team cultural diversity—by assigning staff with similar cultural and linguistic backgrounds to serve culturally homogeneous guest groups, by promoting inter-cultural knowledge sharing, and by role-modeling curious and respectful cross-cultural engagement—are associated with significantly higher team-level satisfaction outcomes than managers who opt for diversity-blind standardization.

6. The Cultural Diversity Satisfaction Model (CDSM)

Based on the synthesized evidence across six themes and the theoretical frameworks discussed in Section 2, we propose the Cultural Diversity Satisfaction Model (CDSM) as an integrative framework that specifies the mechanisms through which cultural diversity influences customer satisfaction in hospitality contexts. The CDSM builds on previous models by (a) including guest diversity and workforce diversity as interacting input variables; (b) identifying cultural competence at individual, team and organisational levels as the main mediating mechanism; (c) identifying the functional, emotional and relational dimensions of culturally inclusive satisfaction; and (d) considering inclusive leadership as a structural moderator of the diversity-competence-satisfaction path.

Layer 1: Cultural Diversity Inputs

The model has two types of cultural diversity in the first layer. • Guest Diversity – the cultural, religious, linguistic and national diversity of the guest population of the property. • Workforce Diversity – the heterogeneous makeup of the service delivery teams. These inputs interact and the degree to which labor

diversity is a service resource relies on the extent to which it is matched to guest diversity demands. The property has a multicultural crew whose cultural backgrounds do not match the key guest nationalities of the property yet it may enhance wider cultural inquiry and empathy norms and limited direct accommodation advantage is provided.

Layer 2: Mediating Mechanisms

The second layer describes three mediating mechanisms by which diversity inputs are transformed into satisfaction outcomes. Individual Cultural Competence is the main individual-level mediator and is backed by substantial empirical evidence (Chen et al., 2016; Kim & McLean, 2012). It consists of metacognitive awareness, cultural knowledge, motivational engagement, and behavioural adaptation (the CQ aspects). Organisational Cultural Competence — that is, training systems, diversity policies, culturally sensitive service design, physical environment adaptation and religious/dietary accommodation provision — is the structural enabling condition for the expression of individual competence. Cultural Co-creation Quality – the moment-by-moment navigation of cultural difference in the service encounter through empathetic responsiveness, adaptive communication and proactive personalisation – is the proximal process mechanism through which satisfaction is engendered by individual and organisational competences.

Layer 3: Satisfaction Outcomes

The model identifies three satisfaction result categories which are variably sensitive to distinct competence mechanisms. Functional Satisfaction – the extent to which the baseline cultural service criteria are met – is mostly determined by organisational cultural competency (dietary provisions, bilingual signage, prayer facilities, culturally suitable room arrangement). Individual cultural competence and quality of co-creation have a greater impact on emotional satisfaction, which is the extent to which guests feel they are really understood, appreciated and valued as culturally different persons. Relational fulfilment and Loyalty – repeat intention, advocacy and brand affiliation – is driven by the mix of functional and emotional fulfilment, moderated by the dignity and fairness of interactions (perceived equity of treatment).

Structural Moderator: Inclusive Leadership

The CDSM conceptualises inclusive leadership behaviour as a structural moderator of all the paths. It moderates the conversion of workforce diversity to cultural competence (by creating team conditions where diversity is deployed rather than suppressed), the relationship between organisational cultural competence and individual expression (by setting norms of culturally attentive service), and the diversity-satisfaction relationship at the team level (by ensuring equitable assignment of culturally competent staff to culturally matched service encounters). congruent across the studies in Theme 6, the empirical evidence for inclusive leadership as a mediator is congruent with meta-analytic findings in the larger diversity–leadership research.

7. Future Research Agenda

The systematic review found six major gaps in the current knowledge base, each of which generated particular research topics and methodological recommendations. Table 4 provides the research agenda in tabular form.

Table 4. Future Research Agenda: Gaps, Questions, and Methodologies

Research Gap	Specific Research Questions	Recommended Methodology	Priority
Lack of longitudinal studies on diversity-satisfaction dynamics	How do cultural accommodation practices affect satisfaction and loyalty over multiple stays? Do effects strengthen or decay over time?	Longitudinal panel studies; time-series analysis; repeated-measures design	High
Underrepresentation of non-Western destination contexts	Do the cultural competence mechanisms identified in Western/Gulf contexts replicate in East African, South Asian, and Latin American hospitality markets?	Multi-country comparative studies; cross-national surveys	High
Limited integration of workforce diversity as mediator	To what extent does multicultural team composition moderate the relationship between guest cultural diversity and satisfaction outcomes?	Multilevel modelling (HLM); dyadic data collection; matched guest-staff samples	High
Algorithmic and digital service delivery across cultures	How do AI-powered service tools (chatbots, recommender systems) perform across cultural user groups? Does cultural adaptation of AI reduce satisfaction gaps?	Experimental designs; A/B testing; digital trace data analysis	Medium
Measurement heterogeneity and lack of validated instruments	Can a validated cross-cultural hospitality satisfaction scale be developed that integrates	Scale development (EFA/CFA); multi-group SEM; Delphi expert panels	High

Research Gap	Specific Research Questions	Recommended Methodology	Priority
	universal dignity indicators with group-specific accommodation metrics?		
Under-theorised mechanisms linking diversity to satisfaction	What are the specific psychological and interactional mechanisms through which cultural competence generates guest satisfaction? Are these mediated by trust, perceived authenticity, or emotional connection?	Process-tracing; mediation analysis; experimental vignette methodology	Medium

7.1 Gap 1: Absence of Longitudinal Evidence

The most basic methodological constraint of the cultural diversity–satisfaction literature is the almost complete lack of longitudinal designs. Cross-sectional designs capture relationships at one point in time and cannot address how satisfaction responses to cultural diversity might change as guests gain experience with culturally competent (or incompetent) service providers, as staff gain cultural competence through extended cross-cultural exposure, or as properties change their accommodation practices in response to market feedback. What is lacking now is a causal evidence foundation that may be provided by longitudinal panel studies of individual hotel guests across numerous visits linked with employee cultural competence assessments. Research questions are: Does the cultural satisfaction premium of culturally competent service delivery endure, magnify, or deteriorate over numerous encounters? Can persistent investment in competence compensate for initial cultural service failures?

7.2 Gap 2: Non-Western and Developing Economy Contexts

The geographic preponderance of evaluated studies in Western Europe, North America and East Asia means that the experiences of hospitality visitors and workers in Sub-Saharan Africa, South and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Latin America are largely underrepresented. These regions are some of the fastest developing tourism markets in the world and have some of the most culturally complex hospitality environments and the transferability of present CDSM methods to these contexts is unproven. Multi-country comparative studies are needed to assess the cross-cultural generalisability of frameworks produced in Western or Gulf contexts and to find mechanisms that are peculiar to the regions but are not captured in the current literature.

7.3 Gap 3: Integrated Workforce–Guest Diversity Analysis

Most of the research analyzed examine guest or labor diversity separately; only 11 percent use an integrated analytical framework. This distinction is analytically restrictive in light of the co-presence of staff and guest cultural diversity in every service encounter, and their potential interaction to yield satisfaction outcomes not anticipated from either component alone. Multilevel modelling methods that simultaneously measure guest-level cultural diversity, employee-level CQ and property-level inclusive climate would permit a more conceptually full analysis of the mechanisms stated in the CDSM.

7.4 Gap 4: AI and Digital Service Delivery Across Cultures

The rapid introduction of AI-enabled service technologies — chatbots, recommendation systems, digital check-in, and algorithmic personalization — in hospitality opens up a whole new frontier of cross-cultural service encounter management that is lacking in the extant literature. AI service systems that are largely trained on Western consumer behaviour data may systematically underperform for non-Western guest populations; culturally adaptive AI that adjusts communication style, recommendation logic and service recovery protocols based on guest cultural profile represents a high-value research and development priority. Develop experimental and A/B testing strategies that compare satisfaction outcomes of conventional and culturally adaptable AI service delivery across guest cultural groups.

7.5 Gap 5: Measurement Heterogeneity

The studied literature uses a fragmented and inconsistent set of satisfaction measuring instruments, cultural competence assessments and diversity operationalisations. This makes cross-study comparison problematic and meta-analytic aggregation impossible. The development and validation of a Culturally Inclusive Hospitality Satisfaction Scale (CIHSS) that incorporates universal dignity indicators and group-specific accommodation measures, and is validated across different cultural groups and hospitality settings using confirmatory factor analysis and multi-group invariance testing, would significantly increase the field's cumulative knowledge-building capacity.

7.6 Gap 6: Psychological Mechanisms Linking Diversity to Satisfaction

While empirical evidence has consistently demonstrated that cultural competence and accommodation are linked to satisfaction, the psychological mechanisms by which these associations occur, such as perceived trust, emotional connection, service authenticity, reduced cognitive load or identity affirmation, are not well theorised and empirically examined. The experimental vignette approach, process-tracing interviews and mediation analysis designs would allow researchers to advance from documenting relationships to explaining the causes, and therefore provide greater theoretical contribution and more accurately focused managerial intervention.

8. Discussion

This systematic review provides four broad observations that confirm and extend the previous knowledge. First, the absolutely crucial variable in the cultural diversity–satisfaction relationship is cultural competency. Over 96+ studies, over 24+ years, over the hospitality settings and methodologies, the extent to which authentic, adaptive and empathetically grounded cultural competence is demonstrated by individual employees and organisations is the strongest consistent predictor of guest

satisfaction in culturally diverse populations. An obvious and practical significance of this finding is that cultural competency development is not a peripheral HR function, but a core service quality investment. Secondly, the perceived dignity and fairness of service interactions is a universal driver of happiness, operating independently of, and maybe even above, specific cultural accommodation measures. Guests who are served technically competent halal meals but treated differentially or disrespectfully in interpersonal interactions are less satisfied overall than guests who are served poor accommodation but handled with palpable warmth and individual respect. This asymmetry spotlights the significance of the dignity architecture of service delivery—interpersonal norms, name recognition practices, equitable treatment protocols, and staff attitudes toward cultural difference—as a prerequisite for, not an add-on to, technical accommodation investments.

Third, the data on workforce diversity as a resource for service is more contingent and more leadership dependent than the diversity–performance literature would suggest. Multicultural teams have the cultural knowledge, language capabilities and empathy repertoires to provide superior culturally inclusive service – but only in inclusive leadership settings that actively employ and develop these assets. The result is that diversity recruitment initiatives need to be matched with investments in inclusive leadership development and organisational culture to deliver on their service quality promise.

Fourth, the proposed CDSM framework makes a theoretical contribution to the discipline by identifying the mediating processes via which cultural diversity inputs lead to satisfaction outcomes, thereby shifting the focus from descriptive association to explanatory theory. The framework’s differentiation of functional, emotional and relational aspects of culturally inclusive satisfaction provides a more nuanced measure and management objective than the unidimensional satisfaction constructs that dominate the existing literature.

9. Practical Implications

9.1 Cultural Competence Training Investment

The continuous finding that behavioural and metacognitive CQ are the strongest indicators of satisfaction has significant implications for the design of training programs. Hospitality operators should move from short cultural awareness workshops that merely transmit knowledge to full Cultural Intelligence Development Programmes that focus on experiential learning, role-play and simulation, structured cross-cultural reflection and continuous peer learning. Training should be role seniority specific, with more granular information for guest-facing personnel, and an extra inclusive leadership track for managers. The commercial rationale for this investment is strong, as experiential training has been shown to achieve effect sizes more than double that of didactic approaches (Kim & McLean, 2012).

9.2 Systematic Cultural Accommodation Auditing

Properties should complete regular Cultural Accommodation Audits to assess: halal and kosher certification status; adequacy of vegetarian and vegan menu options; multilingual signage and communication materials; provision and accessibility of prayer facilities; room configuration protocols for cultural preferences; and cultural representativeness of physical environment design. The audit

results should be compared with the guest cultural makeup of the property and prioritized according to the potential for loyalty with remedial timeframes and accountability given to specified managers.

9.3 Dignity and Fairness Architecture

Findings on dignity and fairness imply that hospitality operators should develop explicit, operationally regulated rules to ensure equitable treatment across guests' ethnic origins. These may include: name pronunciation training and phonetic transcription systems; fair room allocation quality monitoring across guest demographic groups; management review of guest satisfaction data disaggregated by cultural background to identify systematic gaps; and zero-tolerance policies for differential treatment based on perceived nationality or ethnicity. Because of the low cost and high satisfaction return of name-right protocols, they are an obvious priority of any hotel servicing a culturally varied visitor group.

9.4 HRM Strategy and Inclusive Leadership

HR strategies need to focus specifically on workforce cultural diversity in alignment with the property's major guest markets and invest in the inclusive leadership behaviors that enable diverse teams to deliver their cultural service potential. Management development programmes should include inclusive leadership competences – habits of actively deploying team cultural diversity as a service resource, modelling cross-cultural curiosity and guaranteeing equitable participation and recognition across all team members. The evidence of full mediation of inclusive climate in the link between diversity and satisfaction implies that measurement and management of inclusive climate should be adopted as a regular HR performance indicator.

10. Limitations

Certain limitations of this systematic review should moderate interpretation of the findings. Firstly, by focusing only on English language publications, linguistic bias may be introduced, as major scholarship published in Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish, and other languages in which hospitality study is carried out, will be excluded. Multilingual search methodologies should be incorporated into systematic reviews in the future. Secondly, the predominance of cross-sectional survey methods in the underlying literature means that the causal direction of associations observed – while theoretically conceivable – cannot be clearly confirmed by the available evidence. The review synthesizes association evidence, not causal evidence.

Third, the substantial methodological variation across studies (cultural diversity operationalisations, satisfaction measuring instruments, analytical methodologies and sampling tactics) did not allow for a meta-analytic quantitative synthesis. The narrative thematic synthesis was suitable and orderly but does include an element of interpretive judgment that a quantitative aggregation would not. Fourth, some degree of publication bias is inevitable despite the rigour of the PRISMA protocol: studies finding null or unexpected relationships between cultural diversity and satisfaction are less likely to be published and the evidence base of this review reflects that structural tendency of the academic literature.

11. Conclusion

This PRISMA-compliant systematic analysis of 96 peer-reviewed papers provides the most complete evidence synthesis to date of the association between cultural diversity and customer happiness in the hotel business. Cultural variety is an important structural driver of visitor happiness, with the impacts being mediated by cultural competence which is shaped by the design of the service environment, and dependent on the dignity architecture of interpersonal relationships. These results are consistent, robust across methodological techniques and converge on actionable managerial implications.

The Cultural Diversity Satisfaction Model (CDSM) developed in this paper provides a theoretically based integrative framework specifying the mechanisms (individual CQ, organizational cultural competence, cultural co-creation quality and inclusive leadership) that convert cultural diversity inputs into functional, emotional and relational satisfaction outcomes. The approach lends itself to comprehensive empirical testing and refinement across different hospitality settings and cultural communities.

The future research agenda identified - longitudinal dynamics, developing economy contexts, integrated workforce-guest diversity analysis, AI-driven cultural service delivery, measurement standardisation and psychological mechanisms - points to the next generation of scholarship needed to build theory and practice adequate for the cultural complexity of 21st century global hospitality. The industry's capacity to handle that complexity with empathy, intellect and institutional commitment will determine whether cultural diversity becomes its most distinctive competitive advantage, or a recurrent source of preventable service failure.

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