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Intercultural Communication And Co-Creation In Tourist Satisfaction: Asian–European Perspectives In Mandalika, Lombok

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Abstract

This study investigates how intercultural communication competence (ICC), communication skills (CS), quality of interaction (QI), and experience co-creation (ECC) influence tourist satisfaction (TS) in Mandalika, Indonesia. The research aims to examine both direct and indirect effects, including the mediating roles of CS and QI, and the moderating role of ECC. The study also compares responses between Asian and European tourists to uncover cultural differences. Using an explanatory research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires from 581 tourists and analysed using PLS-SEM and Multi-Group Analysis with SmartPLS 4.0.3. The results show that ICC significantly affects TS through CS and QI in the full sample but not within cultural subgroups. ECC significantly strengthens the effect of QI on TS across all groups. This study contributes theoretically to intercultural communication and offers practical guidance for destination managers to adopt culturally adaptive and co-creative service strategies.

Keyword: Intercultural Communication; Communication Skills; Quality of Interaction; Experience Co-Creation; Tourist Satisfaction

Introduction

Tourism is one of the strategic sectors in Indonesia's economic development, emphasising sustainability and the uniqueness of local culture (Diswandi et al., 2025). One of the nationally prioritised destinations currently under development is the Mandalika Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (Pahrudin et al., 2023). With the hosting of international events such as MotoGP and World Superbike (WSBK), supported by globally competitive infrastructure, Mandalika is projected to become a centre of sport tourism while simultaneously driving local economic growth based on cultural and experiential tourism (Caraka et al., 2023).

However, behind the success of physical development and digital promotion, there remain fundamental challenges in fostering quality interactions between tourists and the local community (Su & Wall, 2010). Field reports and preliminary studies have indicated that intercultural miscommunication, misaligned service expectations, and limited tourist participation in local cultural activities often lead to unsatisfactory tourist experiences. In this context, communication can no longer be regarded as a complementary element, but rather as a central component that shapes tourist experience and satisfaction (Tribe & Snaith, 1998).

In line with the views of Tankovic et al.(2023) and Arasaratnam & Doerfel (2005)Intercultural communication competence (ICC) and cultural intelligence are critical factors influencing the quality of cross-cultural tourism interactions. ICC encompasses dimensions such as motivation, empathy, open-mindedness, cross-cultural experience, and communication effectiveness abilities that are highly essential for tourism service providers in global destinations like Mandalika. In practice, communication skills, including verbal, non-verbal, active listening, written, and digital abilities, serve as a mediating mechanism that enables ICC to be concretely implemented in service interactions (Tankovic et al., 2023). Moreover, a clearer integration of ICC and communication skills into the satisfaction framework remains underexplored in current tourism research, creating an urgent need to connect these dimensions through a structured conceptual model.

On the other hand, in today's experience-based tourism landscape, the approach of experience co-creation is increasingly adopted in destination management strategies. Tourists are no longer passive recipients but are active partners in constructing meaning and value from the experiences they undergo (Suntikul & Jachna, 2016). Within this framework, experience co-creation acts as a moderating variable that may strengthen or weaken the relationship between communication skills and tourist satisfaction (Prebensen, Kim, et al., 2016). When tourists are actively involved in the creation of experiences, the communication delivered by service providers has a more significant impact on their perceptions and evaluations (Zatori et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the multicultural context of Mandalika SEZ adds another layer of complexity to this study. The selection of Asian and European tourists is theoretically grounded in the high- and low-context cultural communication typology (Ho et al., 2020), where European tourists generally prefer efficiency and an individualistic approach to service (Gursoy & Umbreit, 2004), while those from East and Southeast Asia tend to emphasise social harmony, politeness, and hospitality in communication (Ismail et al., 2025). These cultural differences and expectations demand adaptive and culturally sensitive communication skills to ensure that tourist–local interactions are harmonious and positively influence tourist satisfaction.

Although tourism literature has extensively addressed digital narratives, destination branding, and social media communication (Labanauskaitė et al., 2020; Matas & Gil, 2024; Ramírez, 2024; Tölkes, 2018; Zhang & Ramayah, 2024), few studies offer a comprehensive empirical investigation that simultaneously integrates ICC, communication skills, and experience co-creation in relation to tourist satisfaction. Most prior research tends to focus on technological aspects or general tourist perceptions (Aboalganam et al., 2025; Ionescu & Sârbu, 2024; Mariani et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2024), without accounting for the complex interpersonal communication processes and local cultural context as integral parts of the tourist experience. This gap becomes even more critical in emerging destinations like Mandalika, which serve as real-world

laboratories for multicultural interaction and communication effectiveness.

Therefore, this study aims to address the identified research gap by examining the influence of intercultural communication competence on tourist satisfaction, with communication skills as a mediating variable and experience co-creation as a moderating variable. The hypotheses proposed are derived from a synthesis of key constructs in intercultural communication, service interaction, and experiential marketing (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Prebensen, Chen, et al., 2016; Tankovic et al., 2023; Zatori et al., 2018)Forming a novel conceptual model. This study is expected to provide theoretical contributions through the development of a conceptual model based on the Partial Least Squares–Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach, and practical insights for tourism stakeholders in Mandalika in designing more adaptive, inclusive, and participatory communication strategies.

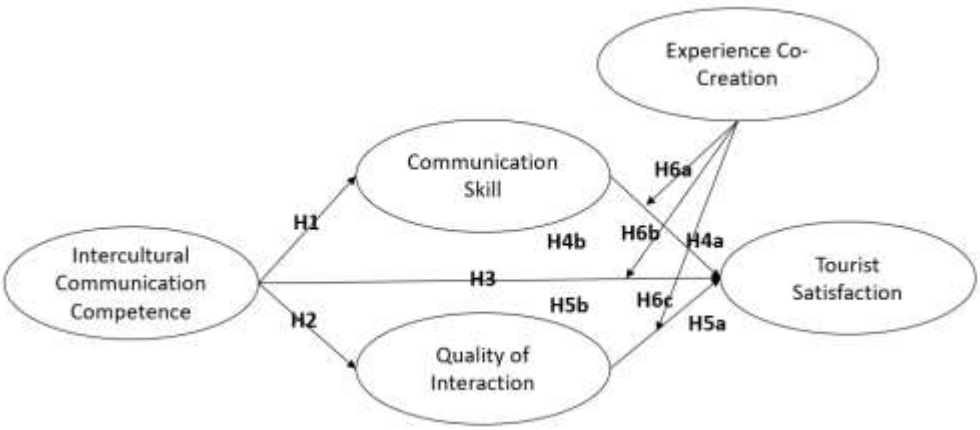

Figure 1. Research Model

Based on the proposed conceptual model, the following research questions and corresponding hypotheses are formulated to guide the investigation:
RQ1. How does Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) influence Tourist Satisfaction (TS), both directly and indirectly through Communication Skills (CS) and Quality of Interaction (QI)?
This research question is addressed through the following hypotheses:

- H1: Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) has a positive effect on Communication Skills (CS).

- H2: Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) has a positive effect on Quality of Interaction (QI).
- H3: Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) has a positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction (TS).
- H4a: Communication Skills (CS) have a positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction (TS).
- H4b: Communication Skills (CS) mediate the relationship between ICC and TS.
- H5a: Quality of Interaction (QI) has a positive effect on Tourist Satisfaction (TS).
- H5 b: Quality of Interaction (QI) mediates the relationship between ICC and TS.

RQ2. To what extent does Experience Co-Creation (ECC) moderate the relationship between communication-related variables (ICC, CS, QI) and Tourist Satisfaction (TS)?

This research question is examined through the following moderation hypotheses:

- H6a: Experience Co-Creation (ECC) positively moderates the relationship between Communication Skills (CS) and Tourist Satisfaction (TS).
- H6b: Experience Co-Creation (ECC) positively moderates the relationship between Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) and Tourist Satisfaction (TS).
- H6c: Experience Co-Creation (ECC) positively moderates the relationship between Quality of Interaction (QI) and Tourist Satisfaction (TS).

RQ3. How do the structural relationships among ICC, CS, QI, ECC, and TS differ between Asian and European tourists visiting Mandalika?

This question is addressed using a multi-group analysis (MGA) approach to compare structural path differences between cultural groups, providing empirical insights into the cultural contingency of communication and satisfaction dynamics in tourism.

Research Method

This research adopts an explanatory approach to examine the relationships between intercultural communication competence (ICC), service communication, tourist–local interaction quality, experience co-creation (ECC), and tourist satisfaction (TS), focusing on comparative perspectives from Asian and European visitors in Mandalika, Indonesia. The explanatory method was selected to explore causal links among these constructs and assess their impact on tourist experiences (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2022). The theoretical framework integrates established concepts of intercultural communication competence (ICC) (Heggernes, 2021)Service communication (SC) (Seguin et al., 2023), quality of interaction (QI) (Suntikul & Jachna, 2016) And experience co-creation (ECC) (Torfing et al., 2021), which are synthesised to evaluate their combined influence on tourist satisfaction (TS) (Tribe & Snaith, 1998).

Data were collected between January and May 2025 in Mandalika, a leading tourism destination in Indonesia, through a structured questionnaire distributed both offline and online using a convenience sampling strategy. This approach was chosen due to the transient nature of international tourists and was supported by collaborations with the Mandalika Hotel Association, ASITA NTB, and PHRI to enhance sample accessibility and practical representativeness. The questionnaire, administered exclusively in English, measured perceptions of intercultural communication competence (ICC), communication skills, quality of interaction, experience co-creation (ECC), and tourist satisfaction, using validated scales adapted from previous studies (Antonietti et al., 2023). A total of 581 valid responses were collected from Asian and European tourists. This sample size exceeds the recommended minimum for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM), ensuring sufficient statistical power and robustness for complex model estimation using SmartPLS 4.0.3 (Hair & Alamer, 2022).

Data analysis employed Multiple Group Analysis (MGA) within the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) framework using SmartPLS 4.0.3 (Harborth & Pape, 2023). MGA was chosen for its ability to detect significant differences in structural relationships between cultural groups (Ngah et al., 2023). SEM was deemed appropriate due to the adequate

sample size, which exceeds the minimum threshold (200–400) recommended for PLS-SEM in complex models (Roodhi et al., 2024). SmartPLS was preferred for its robustness in managing latent variables and handling non-normal data (Aminravan et al., 2025). The analysis proceeded in two phases: first, the measurement model was tested for reliability and validity using indicators such as communication ability and cultural understanding (Gunduz et al., 2024); second, the structural model was assessed to evaluate causal relationships and group differences (Nordbrandt, 2023). A summary of respondent characteristics and responses is presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Respondent Response

Variable	Indicator	Code	Mean	Std. Dev
Intercultural Communication Competence	Knowledge	ICC1	4.012	0.917
	Motivation	ICC2	3.761	1.119
	Empathic Listening	ICC3	3.83	0.991
	Cross-cultural Experiences	ICC4	3.842	1.017
	Global Mindset	ICC5	3.904	0.904
	Behavioral Flexibility	ICC6	3.916	0.968
	Respect	ICC7	3.96	0.973
	Open-mindedness	ICC8	3.704	1.156
	Empathy	ICC9	3.974	0.952
	Adaptability	ICC10	4.062	0.916
	Communication Effectiveness	ICC11	3.998	0.93
Communication Skills	Written Communication Skills	CS1	4.046	0.997
	Oral Communication Skills	CS2	4.076	0.936
	Listening Communication Skills	CS3	3.563	1.277
	Digital Communication Skills	CS4	3.928	0.977
	Non-verbal Communication Skills	CS5	3.96	0.991

Quality of Interaction	Understanding Local Culture	QI1	3.995	0.902
	Understanding Local Life	QI2	4.003	0.876
	Acquire More Local Travel Knowledge	QI3	3.972	0.946
	Get to Know More Friends	QI4	3.923	0.925
Tourist Satisfaction (Destination Attributes)	Physical Resort and Facilities	TS1	4.108	0.846
	Ambiance	TS2	4.105	0.816
	Restaurants, Bars, Shops, and Nightlife	TS3	4.084	0.891
	Transfers	TS4	4.15	0.848
	Heritage and Culture	TS5	4.072	0.822
	Accommodation	TS6	4.174	0.718
Experience Co-Creation	Entertainment	ECC1	3.819	0.997
	Education	ECC2	4.017	0.86
	Esthetic	ECC3	3.9	0.935
	Escapism	ECC4	3.921	0.928

Results and Discussion

1. Respondent Characteristic

Table 2. Respondent Characteristic

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age (Years)	< 25	144	24.78
	26–35	222	38.21
	36–45	144	24.78
	> 45	76	13.08
Gender	Male	280	48.19
	Female	301	51.81
Asian Countries	China	34	5.85
	India	37	6.37

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
	Indonesia	35	6.02
	Japan	37	6.37
	Malaysia	42	7.23
	Saudi Arabia	38	6.54
	South Korea	43	7.4
	Thailand	38	6.54
	Total	304	52.32
European Countries	France	32	5.51
	Germany	41	7.06
	Italy	38	6.54
	Netherlands	42	7.23
	Spain	44	7.57
	Sweden	44	7.57
	United Kingdom	36	6.2
	Total	277	47.68

The demographic profile of the respondents, as presented in Table 2, provides insights into the composition of the sample. The age distribution indicates that the majority of respondents (38.21%) fall within the 26–35 years age group, followed by the < 25 years and 36–45 years groups (each 24.78%), and the > 45 years group (13.08%), reflecting a predominance of productive-age tourists. Gender distribution is nearly balanced, with 48.19% male and 51.81% female respondents, suggesting equitable representation across genders. Geographically, 52.32% of respondents originate from Asia, with notable contributions from Malaysia (7.23%), South Korea (7.40%), Japan and India (each 6.37%), and other countries such as Indonesia, China, Thailand, and Saudi Arabia (ranging from 5.85% to 6.54%), highlighting the diversity of regional tourists. Conversely, 47.68% of respondents are from Europe, with significant representation from Spain and Sweden (each 7.57%), the Netherlands (7.23%), Germany (7.06%), and other nations including France, Italy, and the United Kingdom (ranging from 5.51% to 6.20%), indicating a substantial presence of international tourists. This distribution supports the comparative cross-cultural analysis between Asian and European perspectives in this study.

2. Result of Validity and Reliability

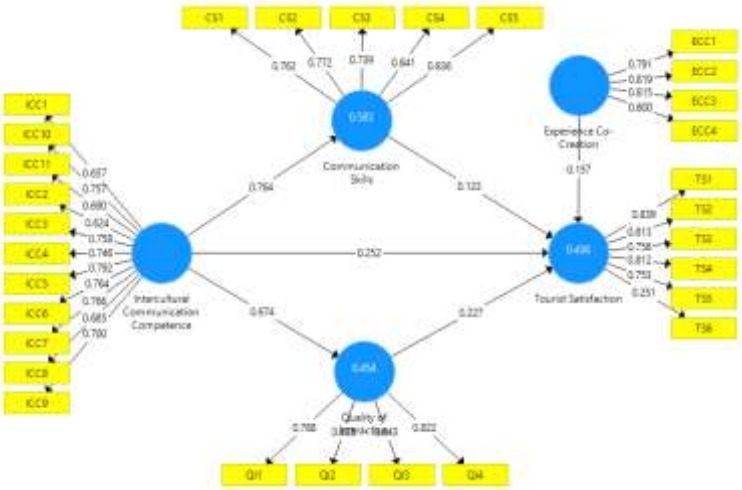

Figure 2. Results of Validity and Reliability Testing

After the data were collected, an initial evaluation of the Structural Equation Model was conducted using SmartPLS, including assessments of the outer model, construct reliability and validity, and discriminant validity. However, as shown in Figure 2, several indicator items were found to be invalid due to factor loadings below the acceptable threshold of 0.70, specifically, ICC1, ICC2, ICC8, ICC11, and TS6. Consequently, these indicators were removed from the model. The revised model was then re-estimated, as presented in Figure 3, Table 3, and Table 4.

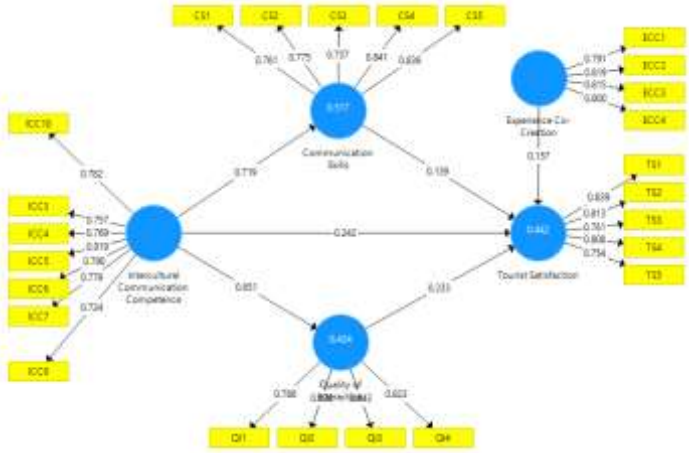

Figure 3. Results of Validity and Reliability Testing (Revised Model)

Table 3. Results of Validity and Reliability Testing

Variable	Code	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Intercultural Communication Competence	ICC3	0.757	0.889	0.913	0.6
	ICC4	0.769			
	ICC5	0.819			
	ICC6	0.79			
	ICC7	0.779			
	ICC9	0.724			
	ICC10	0.782			
Communication Skills	CS1	0.761	0.85	0.893	0.626
	CS2	0.775			
	CS3	0.737			
	CS4	0.841			
	CS5	0.836			
Quality of Interaction	QI1	0.786	0.84	0.893	0.676
	QI2	0.836			
	QI3	0.843			
	QI4	0.823			
Experience Co-Creation	ECC1	0.791	0.821	0.881	0.65
	ECC2	0.819			
	ECC3	0.815			
	ECC4	0.8			
Tourist Satisfaction	TS1	0.839	0.855	0.896	0.633
	TS2	0.813			
	TS3	0.761			
	TS4	0.808			
	TS5	0.754			

Table 4. Results of Discriminant Validity

	CS	ECC	ICC	QI	TS
CS					
ECC	0.775				
ICC	0.821	0.849			
QI	0.71	0.659	0.752		
TS	0.643	0.652	0.695	0.657	

As shown in Table 3, the factor loading values meet the required threshold for instrument validity. Additionally, both Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceed 0.70, indicating that the constructs in the model are reliable (Hair & Alamer, 2022). The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are above 0.50, demonstrating adequate convergent validity (Cheung et al., 2024). Furthermore, Table 4 shows that the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) values for the constructs are below the recommended threshold of 0.90, confirming the discriminant validity of the model (Henseler et al., 2015). Therefore, the study is considered suitable to proceed to the next stage of analysis.

3. Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

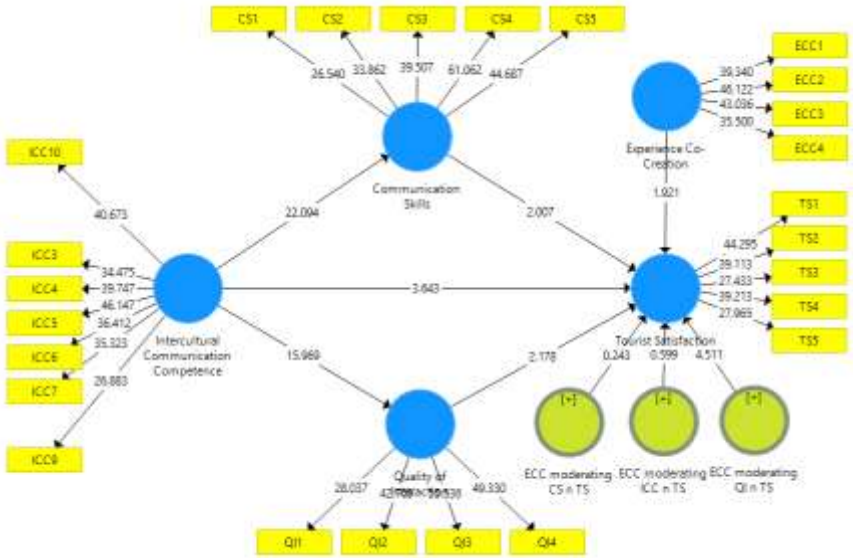

Figure 4. Structural Model Output for the Full Data Group

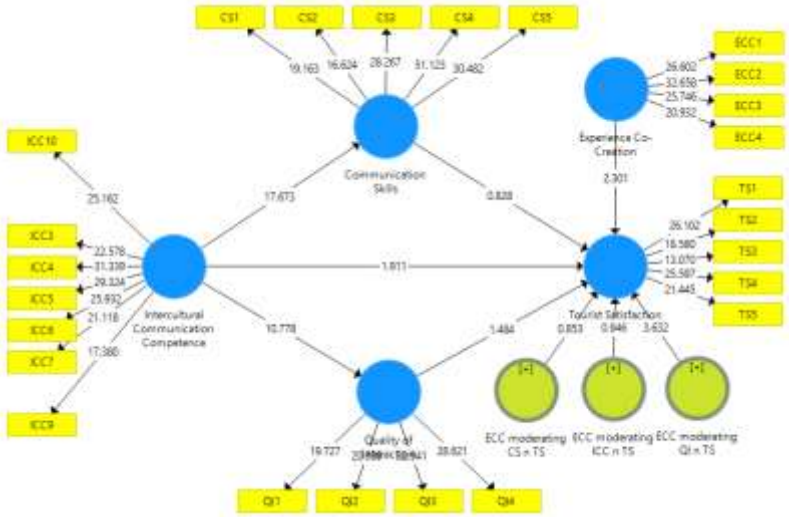

Figure 5. Structural Model Output for the Asian Data Group

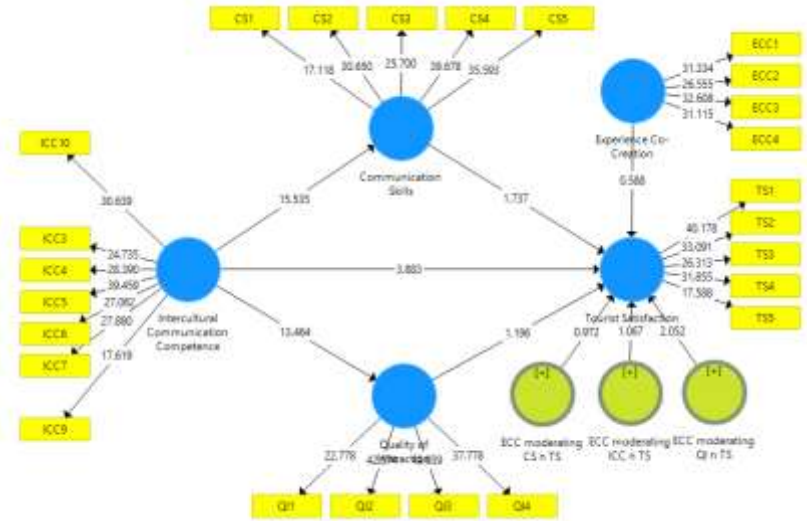

Figure 6. Structural Model Output for the European Data Group

To test the proposed hypotheses, this study utilizes a combination of Moderation Regression Analysis (MRA) and Multi-Group Analysis (MGA) within the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) framework. MRA examines the extent to which a moderating variable alters the strength or direction of the relationship between constructs, allowing the detection of contextual influences that may not be

captured by direct effect models. MGA complements this approach by comparing structural path differences across respondent groups, specifically between Asian and European tourists, thereby revealing potential variations in behavioral patterns across cultural contexts.

The outcomes of the structural model estimations are illustrated in Figures 4, 5, and 6, which represent the complete dataset, the Asian sample, and the European sample, respectively. These figures display the path coefficients and interconstruct relationships within each group. Detailed statistical outputs, including path significance, effect sizes, and comparative group analyses, are provided in Table 5. Table 5 offers a comprehensive summary that supports a more accurate interpretation of moderation and cross-group effects within the tourism setting of Mandalika.

Table 5. Results of Direct, Indirect, and Moderating Effects

Direct Effect			
Direct Effect (Complete)	T Statistics	P Values	Note
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Communication Skills	22.094	0	Significant
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Quality of Interaction	15.969	0	Significant
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Tourist Satisfaction	3.643	0	Significant
Communication Skills -> Tourist Satisfaction	2.007	0.045	Significant
Quality of Interaction -> Tourist Satisfaction	2.178	0.03	Significant
Direct Effect (Asian)			
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Communication Skills	17.673	0	Significant
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Quality of Interaction	10.778	0	Significant

Direct Effect			
Direct Effect (Complete)	T Statistics	P Values	Note
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Tourist Satisfaction	1.911	0.057	Not Significant
Communication Skills -> Tourist Satisfaction	0.828	0.408	Not Significant
Quality of Interaction -> Tourist Satisfaction	1.484	0.139	Not Significant
Direct Effect (Europe)			
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Communication Skills	15.535	0	Significant
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Quality of Interaction	13.464	0	Significant
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Tourist Satisfaction	3.883	0	Significant
Communication Skills -> Tourist Satisfaction	1.737	0.083	Not Significant
Quality of Interaction -> Tourist Satisfaction	1.196	0.232	Not Significant
Indirect Effect			
Indirect Effect (Complete)	T Statistics	P Values	Note
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Communication Skills -> Tourist Satisfaction	2.045	0.041	Significant
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Quality of Interaction -> Tourist Satisfaction	2.074	0.039	Significant
Indirect Effect (Asian)			
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Communication Skills -> Tourist Satisfaction	0.829	0.408	Not Significant

Direct Effect			
Direct Effect (Complete)	T Statistics	P Values	Note
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Quality of Interaction -> Tourist Satisfaction	1.43	0.153	Not Significant
Indirect Effect (Europe)			
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Communication Skills -> Tourist Satisfaction	1.758	0.079	Not Significant
Intercultural Communication Competence -> Quality of Interaction -> Tourist Satisfaction	1.155	0.249	Not Significant
Moderating Effect			
Moderating Regression (Complete)	T Statistics	P Values	Note
ECC moderating CS n TS -> Tourist Satisfaction	0.243	0.808	Not Significant
ECC moderating ICC n TS -> Tourist Satisfaction	0.599	0.55	Not Significant
ECC moderating QI n TS -> Tourist Satisfaction	4.511	0	Significant
Moderating Regression (Asian)	T Statistics	P Values	
ECC moderating CS n TS -> Tourist Satisfaction	0.853	0.394	Not Significant
ECC moderating ICC n TS -> Tourist Satisfaction	0.946	0.344	Not Significant
ECC moderating QI n TS -> Tourist Satisfaction	3.632	0	Significant
Moderating Regression (Europe)	T Statistics	P Values	
ECC moderating CS n TS -> Tourist Satisfaction	0.972	0.332	Not Significant
ECC moderating ICC n TS -> Tourist Satisfaction	1.067	0.287	Not Significant

Direct Effect			
Direct Effect (Complete)	T Statistics	P Values	Note
ECC moderating QI n TS -> Tourist Satisfaction	2.052	0.041	Not Significant

The application of structural equation modeling (SEM) in this study enabled a comprehensive analysis of both direct and indirect relationships among latent constructs, offering a nuanced understanding of how intercultural communication competence (ICC) influences communication-related outcomes and tourist satisfaction (TS) across culturally diverse groups. By simultaneously assessing measurement reliability and structural paths, the model evaluation uncovered key mechanisms such as communication skills, quality of interaction, and experience co-creation that mediate or moderate the impact of ICC on tourist experiences. This approach confirmed the robustness of the proposed framework and revealed meaningful cultural variations in how communication competencies and interactions contribute to satisfaction, thus enhancing both theoretical insight and managerial relevance in multicultural tourism contexts.

The relationship between intercultural competence and tourists' ability to communicate effectively is supported by strong empirical evidence (H1). In the full sample, the relationship yielded a t-value of 22.094 ($p = 0.000$), well above the 1.96 threshold, confirming a highly significant effect. This pattern is also observed in both the Asian ($t = 17.673$, $p = 0.000$) and European ($t = 15.535$, $p = 0.000$) subgroups. These results suggest that tourists who are more globally minded, empathetic, and adaptable tend to communicate more effectively across written, oral, digital, non-verbal, and listening channels. This supports the argument that the ICC acts as a foundation for interactional fluency in intercultural settings (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Tankovic et al., 2023).

The ability to interact meaningfully with local people and environments is also shaped by ICC (H2). Tourists who exhibit higher cultural competence report greater quality of interaction, with significant results in the full model ($t = 15.969$, $p = 0.000$), as well as among Asian (t

= 10.778) and European (t = 13.464) groups. This suggests that culturally competent tourists are more likely to engage in experiences that foster understanding of local culture and life and that support the development of social bonds. In the context of Mandalika, this may include conversations with Sasak hosts in traditional villages, visits to local markets, and learning about indigenous philosophies embedded in architecture, crafts, and rituals.

The direct effect of ICC on tourist satisfaction (H3) reveals interesting cultural dynamics. While the relationship is statistically significant in the full sample (t = 3.643, p = 0.000) and among European tourists (t = 3.883, p = 0.000), it is not significant among Asians (t = 1.911, p = 0.057). This finding suggests that European tourists, who tend to evaluate satisfaction based on professionalism, competence, and clarity—hallmarks of ICC—interpret these traits as directly enhancing their travel experience. In contrast, Asian tourists, whose satisfaction is more emotionally grounded, may expect deeper relational harmony, non-verbal empathy, and sincere social engagement. ICC, as measured in this study, may not fully capture these subtle but culturally vital affective dimensions (Ismail et al., 2025).

Communication skills also influence satisfaction, though not uniformly across cultures (H4a). In the full model, the path from communication skills to satisfaction is statistically significant (t = 2.007, p = 0.045), indicating that communication proficiency enhances satisfaction with aspects like facilities, ambiance, heritage, and transportation. However, this relationship is non-significant in the Asian (t = 0.828, p = 0.408) and European (t = 1.737, p = 0.083) subgroups. The result suggests that tourists from both regions may consider communication ability an expected service standard, insufficient on its own to produce satisfaction unless linked with emotional depth (in the Asian context) or outcome efficiency (in the European context) (Kusi et al., 2025; Stoyanova-Bozhkova et al., 2022).

Communication skills also act as an indirect channel through which ICC influences satisfaction (H4b). In the full sample, the mediating effect is significant (t = 2.045, p = 0.041), affirming that ICC supports satisfaction partly by enhancing communication abilities. However, this mediating effect is not significant for Asian (t = 0.829, p = 0.408) or European tourists (t = 1.758, p = 0.079). This points to cultural differences in how

communication is internalized. Among Asian tourists, satisfaction may be contingent on emotional warmth conveyed through respectful tone and ritual gestures, whereas European tourists prioritize clarity and problem-solving over interactional formality (Alyeksyeyeva, 2018; Falk, 2021).

The impact of quality interaction on tourist satisfaction (H5a) follows a similar pattern. While a significant relationship is present in the full model ($t = 2.178$, $p = 0.030$), the path is not significant for Asian ($t = 1.484$, $p = 0.139$) or European groups ($t = 1.196$, $p = 0.232$). These results underscore the need for deeper cultural alignment in tourist–host interactions. For instance, simply being welcomed at a weaving demonstration may not satisfy an Asian tourist unless it includes symbolic gestures like the offering of kain songket as a token of respect. For European tourists, interaction must offer novelty or knowledge, such as through personalized heritage tours or information-rich conversations with local historians.

As a mediating factor, interaction quality helps explain the relationship between ICC and satisfaction (H5 b). In the full sample, the mediation effect is significant ($t = 2.074$, $p = 0.039$), suggesting that ICC fosters better interaction, which in turn enhances satisfaction. Yet, this path is not significant among Asians ($t = 1.43$, $p = 0.153$) or Europeans ($t = 1.155$, $p = 0.249$), emphasizing once again that not all interaction is equally valued. Unless the interaction is emotionally resonant or functionally relevant, it may not translate into higher satisfaction.

Experience co-creation provides a compelling insight into how tourist participation strengthens outcomes (H6c). When tourists are involved in entertainment, education, aesthetics, or escapism-driven experiences, the effect of interaction quality on satisfaction is significantly enhanced. The moderation effect is strong in the full sample ($t = 4.511$, $p = 0.000$) and significant for both Asian ($t = 3.632$, $p = 0.000$) and European ($t = 2.052$, $p = 0.041$) groups. This suggests that participatory tourism creates emotionally charged, personalized experiences. In Mandalika, co-creation is evident in culinary workshops preparing ayam taliwang, wearing traditional Sasak attire during adat peresean ceremonies, or participating in Gendang Beleq drum performances. These activities transform passive spectators into cultural contributors, satisfying the emotional-social needs

of Asian tourists and the experiential-autonomous preferences of European visitors (Prebensen, Chen, et al., 2016; Zatori et al., 2018).

In contrast, the moderating role of co-creation is not observed in the relationship between communication skills and satisfaction (H6a) ($t = 0.243$, $p = 0.808$), nor between ICC and satisfaction (H6b) ($t = 0.599$, $p = 0.550$). These effects remain non-significant across cultural groups, indicating that while co-creation enhances the emotional and symbolic aspects of interaction, it does not elevate the perceived value of competencies like communication or intercultural awareness. Tourists assume these qualities as baseline requirements, not enhanced through their own participation.

Multi-group analysis reinforces the culturally contingent nature of these findings. While ICC consistently strengthens communication skills and interaction quality, its ability to influence satisfaction is filtered through each group's cultural expectations. In response, destination managers in Mandalika should design culturally segmented experiences. For Asian tourists, curated community-based experiences that emphasize group harmony, traditional rituals, and emotional storytelling are essential. For European tourists, co-creation should focus on personal growth, freedom of exploration, and immersive learning through activities such as guided nature trails, archaeological workshops, or digital heritage storytelling.

Although the model offers important theoretical and practical insights, its explanatory power is limited by the exclusion of affective constructs such as perceived sincerity, emotional closeness, or relational trust—factors that may be especially influential for Asian tourists and relevant for Europeans in symbolic contexts. Future studies should expand the framework to include these affective dimensions, which can be captured through reflective items or in-depth qualitative inquiry.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that while intercultural competence, communication, and interaction form the core of effective tourism experiences, their impact on satisfaction is significantly magnified when embedded in culturally meaningful co-creation. In a destination like Mandalika, where cultural identity, heritage, and hospitality traditions such as gotong royong and adat istiadat Sasak remain vibrant, co-creation

is not merely an optional design feature but a pathway to deep engagement, long-term memory formation, and differentiated tourist satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study reveals the complex interplay between intercultural communication competence (ICC), communication skills (CS), quality of interaction (QI), and experience co-creation (ECC) in shaping tourist satisfaction (TS) within multicultural destinations such as Mandalika. The findings affirm that ICC significantly enhances CS and QI across cultural groups, yet its direct and indirect effects on TS are moderated by cultural context. For Asian tourists, emotional resonance and symbolic gestures play a larger role in satisfaction formation, while European tourists emphasize clarity, autonomy, and service efficiency. Experience co-creation significantly strengthens the link between interaction quality and satisfaction, especially when tourists actively engage in culturally immersive activities, such as Sasak weaving, cooking traditional dishes, or participating in ceremonial performances.

From a managerial perspective, tourism stakeholders must develop culturally segmented co-creation strategies. Service designs should reflect the relational preferences of Asian tourists and the experiential independence sought by European visitors. Training programs for front-line staff should incorporate modules on cultural sensitivity, emotional intelligence, and adaptive communication techniques. Furthermore, integrating digital communication tools—such as multilingual mobile apps, virtual guides, or AI-enabled chatbots—may further support tailored experiences.

This study acknowledges limitations, including the exclusion of emotional constructs and the absence of longitudinal data. Future research should integrate affective variables like trust and perceived sincerity, and examine the role of digital and hybrid service formats. A culturally adaptive communication framework that embraces co-creation, emotional nuance, and technological integration will be essential for enhancing tourist experiences in increasingly diverse global destinations.

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