

Gender Communication of Batik Air Flight Attendants in Improving Customer Service

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Abstract

Gender perception in Indonesia is influenced by sociological and cultural processes that focus on the division of roles and work. While people often associate gender with a certain gender. In economic challenges, such as gender inequalities in education, physical quality, labor, and migration, exacerbate gender imbalances. Cultural norms and values contribute to a more diverse workforce. Based on these problems, this study aims to provide an overview of how gender communication is carried out by flight attendants in improving services while being employees at Batik Air airline. The method used in this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Primary data was obtained from a semi-structured interview process with three informants who worked as Batik Air flight attendants with the criteria of having at least 5 years of experience in Batik airlines. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained through the process of collecting literature data such as articles and other sources, both from national and international books and journals. The interviews with the interviewees focused on service during Batik Air's flight attendants, as well as experience in dealing with customers, especially those related to gender. The viewpoint used in analyzing data uses *standpoint theory*. With their experience and knowledge, this article examines how communication is used. The results of the research revealed that: 1) flight attendants use their experience and knowledge to build communication, 2) three aspects of *standpoint theory*, namely *standpoint*, *situated knowledge*, and *sexual division of labor* that are inherent in flight attendants, both their experience and knowledge during work, make it easier for them to build communication with customers, which *incidentally* come from diverse backgrounds. Future research that needs to be developed is to quantitatively measure the effectiveness of gender-based communication.

Keywords: *Communication, Gender, Batik Air, and Flight Attendants, Service, Customers*

INTRODUCTION

The flight attendant profession can be said to be an icon of an airline, especially in shaping the image in society. However, when it comes to communication, it is often a problem when it is not in line with customers or passengers. The difference in receiving messages is a challenge from a flight attendant, who *incidentally* is a woman. The public's view of women often creates different perceptions, especially when viewed in a patriarchal way. Women are considered inferior to men. Therefore, women's awareness in seeing the patriarchal perspective in society is the basic capital to build communication, especially related to gender. In this case, gender communication is important in providing services to airline customers.

Gender theory stems from sociological and cultural processes related to how men and women share roles and places in society. Most people consider women's social roles to be inferior and passive compared to men. This is considered a cultural construct rather than a natural fact (Kartika & Kanada, 2017). Although every Indonesian woman has the right to choose in taking on roles in the domestic or public sector, the culture and norms prevailing in some Indonesian societies cause more female workers to be employed in the domestic sector than in the public sector.

As a developing country, Indonesia has experienced quite rapid economic growth. This economic growth opens up wider opportunities in reducing gender inequality. Gender inequality in the world of work is still a topic that should still be raised because gender inequality occurs in work. Public perceptions of differences between men and women in terms of education, physical quality, duties and skills, male migration, productive access, and socio-cultural restrictions make it more difficult for women to get opportunities in the workforce, and this leads to gender inequality (Mehrotra & Sinha, 2017). The persistence of gender inequality in Indonesia, especially in the field of employment, can be shown by women's access to the job market is lower than that of men, as well as the tendency of women to work for lower wages than male workers (Yusrini, 2017).

This inequality is caused by differences related to gender itself, according to Yayah Nurhidayah and Eti Nurhayati (2018), Generally, women have low self-concept, the need for achievement, and self-esteem and ambiguity about success, while men have high self-concept, motivation to achieve, and self-esteem, have higher targets so that their levels of stress and depression are higher, and their life expectancy is shorter.

In the view of *standpoint* theory, women's problems in the social sphere are placed on how women see and understand their social position (Gurung, 2020).

Nancy Hartsock uses this theory as the *Feminist Standpoint Theory*. Initially, this theory was initiated by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in 1807. He discusses the relationship between 'masters' and 'slaves'. This relationship causes a different standpoint. The social structure shapes them to be different (Nugroho et al., 2021).

The standpoint *theory* also places the importance of power relations in the process of knowledge production. The goal is to virtually liberate women from all forms of discrimination (Kusuma & Asror, 2022)

The quote gives an idea that in terms of situations and conditions, women and men are on different levels. In this gender-different social order, the fate of individuals, without exception in the world of work. The chances of men getting a job are much greater. This situation occurred a lot in the 2000s, but in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, gender became the main topic of ideas discussed in the SDGs (*Sustainable Development Goals*) where President Joko Widodo said that women represent half of the country's development drivers (Ridhwani & Lestari, 2023). The issue of gender equality is now a full concern in the SDGs. With this priority program, it opens up wider opportunities for women to contribute to work in Indonesia. According to a report by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), Indonesia's Labor Force Participation Rate

(TPAK) continued to increase throughout 2019-2023 where in August 2023, Indonesia's TPAK increased to 69.48% and the percentage of female workers was 54.2%. This figure can be said to be quite good. However, it is still very low compared to the male labor force which reaches 84.26% (Annur, 2023).

Women's contribution to the world of work is very necessary, especially for the air service workforce. Competition in air transportation services is getting more rapid, with the presence of many airlines that also provide domestic and foreign transportation services. In its development, transportation services are utilized through an intense approach in the form of professional services presented by airport management, pilots, flight attendants, and flight attendants. In airline services, the flight attendant profession is a profession that can only be filled by women by prioritizing professional service to airline passengers (Karwur & Ceasarany, 2020), Batik Air is no exception.

Batik Air was established in May 2013 under the Company PT Lion Mentari Airlines. At the beginning of its flights, Batik Air served the Jakarta-Manado and Jakarta-Balipapan routes (detik.com, 2013). Currently, Batik Air is expanding flight routes to 45 cities, domestic and international, which include Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Indiak, Australia to Taiwan (kontan, 2020)

Batik Air is a subsidiary of Lion

Air Group along with other airlines, namely Lion Air, Wings Air, Batik Air Malaysia, Thai Lion Air, and Super Air Jet. Lion Air was established on November 15, 1999 and its first flight was carried out on June 30, 2000 on the Jakarta-Pontianak route (dinaskerja, 2024)

In carrying out professional services, the use of effective communication is very necessary. According to Nurdin et al (2013), communication as a process that involves the exchange of messages and the creation of meaning in order to achieve effective communication, interpersonal communication needs to be emphasized.

Broadly speaking, the air services provided by flight attendants can be pursued with effective interpersonal communication. However, in improving professional services, effective communication is needed to be able to analyze the situation and provide the right service to passengers. But in reality, many cases have been found that passengers often commit verbal violence against flight attendants. This inequality triggers the phenomenon of *inequality*. It is hoped that communication can trigger a positive response while solving the needs of passengers. But the fact is that communication doesn't always trigger a positive response from passengers, and flight attendants often receive verbal abuse from airline passengers. In addition, in the service process that occurs in airlines,

flight attendants tend to face gender discrimination.

Judging from the description of these facts, the author is interested in raising research with the theme of gender communication. Gender communication is considered to be able to know how humans as gender creatures communicate. Based on the description of these problems, this paper aims to provide an overview of how gender communication is used in improving professional services for Batik Air flight attendants.

Research on Batik Air was conducted by Nanik Rianandita Sari and Nur Makkie Perdana Kusuma (2022). However, the research is not about service to customers, but about nationalism in the Batik Air logo. This study discusses logos represented through sign elements such as on the tail fin and flight attendant uniform. Nationalism is interpreted as fostering a sense of love in work, building national potential, loving domestic products by empowering and utilizing them.

Another study closer to this one was conducted by Garry Vardy Karwur and Nadya Ceasarany (2020). This study discusses the influence of flight attendant service quality on passenger satisfaction of Batik Air Indonesia.

Another study on airline services outside of Batik Air was written by Khaerunnizar and Nugroho (2022). This study discusses the service of XYZ airline (pseudonym) as an airline that has an average service quality with a percentage

of 34.8% giving positive reviews, 32.8% giving neutral reviews, and 32.5% giving negative reviews. Customer complaints related to the airline's quality include 12 problems, including the length of the inspection duration, queues at the *boarding gate*, delay compensation that is considered inappropriate, baggage that is often damaged and lost, little baggage capacity, unfriendliness of staff or staff, rude intonation, bad attitude, ignoring passengers, expensive baggage, and tickets that are considered too expensive but not in accordance with the services provided.

The results of research on Batik Air services and others show the importance of airline services from any aspect, including flight attendant services, which are the spearhead of airline services. Therefore, this article is important to discuss and discuss flight attendant services in terms of gender communication considering that flight attendants are part of an airline's brand image, in addition to other visual communications such as logos and *taglines* attached to the media used by Batik Air.

Meanwhile, research on gender communication has been conducted by Erik Ardiyanto (2021) titled *Gender Communication: Career Women, the Meaning of Happiness and Self-Image on Social Media*. Ardiyanto's research explores forms of gender communication such as gender injustice in women's work that hinders their careers. On the other

hand, Ardiyanto found the concept of happiness in women who pursue their passion at work. Women like this are happier in their lives. Meanwhile, another finding is that women who work in the informal sector by utilizing social media have higher incomes than women who work in the formal sector.

However, the authors did not discuss the concept of happiness in relation to gender in this study. The author wants to describe how gender-based communication is implemented by flight attendants in the midst of a patriarchal background.

METHOD

Based on the problems discussed, the approach used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach. The goal is to reveal gender-based communication carried out by women who work as flight attendants, related to service to customers or passengers.

However, the concept of gender must be clearly distinguished that gender is not the same as gender which refers to a biological condition, male or female. While gender in this case refers to social constructions to categorize a person. Usually, this categorization uses the terms masculine and feminine, and establishes certain characteristics. However, some researchers are of the view that the concept of gender is not fixed and can change, beyond the terms masculine and feminine (Danumaya, 2020; Thurlow & Tomic,

2004).

The theory used is *the standpoint theory*. Standpoint theory or also known as attitude theory is a theory that can change a person's power through the authority of an individual's personal voice (Putriana, 2017). This theory provides a framework for understanding the power system. This framework is built on the knowledge gained from human daily life, i.e. that people are active consumers of the real world, and that a person's personal views are the most important source of information about their experiences. Standpoint theory allows everyone to have an independent opinion. In addition, this theory states that individual experiences, knowledge, and communication are formed within the social group to which they belong (West & Turner, 2010)

There are three important aspects of this theory: *standpoint*, *situated knowledge*, and *sexual division of labor*. The first aspect is *a standpoint* or point of view, which refers to a location shared by a group that is considered an *outsider* in the social structure, which provides a kind of understanding of the experiences they have experienced. Characteristics from a point of view are not something given. A point of view is created from someone who experiences, thinks, reflects reality, interacts and performs certain struggles (West & Turner, 2010).

The second is *situated knowledge*,

which is a person's knowledge based on context and situation. Knowledge lies in experience and is dual. The position of knowledge reminds us that our knowledge and actions come from our own experiences (West & Turner, 2010).

The third is *the sexual division of labour*. This aspect distinguishes the roles of men and women based on social roles in the public and domestic sectors (West & Turner, 2010).

This study uses data sourced from primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from a semi-structured interview process with 3 (three) informants who work as Batik Air flight attendants. These three informants have at least 5 years of experience in Batik Air airlines. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained through the process of collecting literature data such as articles and other sources, both from books, national and international journals. Interviews focused on communicating gender concepts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Batik Air Indonesia is one of the many airlines in Indonesia, which has been established since 2013, under the auspices of Lion Group. The airline offers premium services or full-service *flight services*. In carrying out air transportation services, airlines have the responsibility to meet the needs of passengers during flights, where the airline provides assistants who have the task of accompanying passengers. These airline assistants are part of the

cabin crew, namely flight attendants and flight attendants (Tsafarakis et al., 2018). Flight attendants are the *brand image* of an airline which can be said that flight attendants are a reflection of the airline's identity. For companies engaged in air transportation services, the symbol is the embodiment of hospitality and wholehearted professional service (Sari & Kusuma, 2021).

Flight attendants are cabin crew, both female and male (called flight attendants). Flight attendants work by serving passengers such as delivering announcements, delivering food, and maintaining passenger safety, especially in emergency situations (sttkd.ac.id, 2023)

However, although not all, the work of flight attendants as professionals is inseparable from gender discrimination, especially in interacting with customers or passengers. Based on the results of interviews from the three informants, two of them said they had never experienced gender discrimination. But the third informant said the opposite, as in the following quote:

Once, I was deemed unable to resolve or resolve a dispute between two male passengers (Y.S.E. Lestari, Personal Communication, May 31, 2024).

In *the standpoint* theory, what Yunita experienced was in the aspect of *the sexual division of labour* which distinguishes the roles of men and women based on social roles in the public and

domestic sectors.

What Yunita experienced illustrates that women are still underestimated by society, especially in resolving cases that are considered 'masculine'. This means that splitting two people who are fighting is considered only possible by men. This general view in society is still inherent everywhere, both in the social, educational, and scope of work. The world community, especially in the Eastern region such as Indonesia, still implements a patriarchal culture with many jobs that restrict women.

In *the standpoint* theory, in the case experienced by flight attendants, men hold a strong position and thus try to maintain the status quo. Men are not interested in considering other people's perspectives.

From a gender point of view, as expressed by Mansour Fakih (2016) that gender is a social construct, in which men and women, each have a role in social life. This means that women are not only made subordinates to men, that is, their social roles are not empowered more widely.

Gender issues are still a hot topic of discussion in the world of work. According to Azisah (2016), Gender is the boundary or distinction that separates men and women that are closely related to the roles, behaviors, and traits that are considered appropriate for both men and women. Gender issues not only highlight women, but also highlight the role of men. In the social order, gender discrimination is still widely found in the world of work.

This is true for flight attendants, especially in dealing with passengers. This is because in a patriarchal society, men are considered more dominant, centralized, and privileged. Women, on the other hand, are considered a subordinate, disadvantaged and marginalized group (Arfiani, 2021).

Norms in societies that adopt eastern values and culture often make women subordinate to men. This is often encountered when women choose jobs or professions that are considered not in accordance with the culture in society, especially in the east. This view is even narrower when understanding religion conservatively so that it assumes that women can only move in the domestic area.

As a representation of the airline's service and professional image, both can be done by undergoing a significant effective communication process by looking at the situation and condition of the passengers. The creation of a good image in the sustainability of business processes in a company will have an impact on the company's reputation so that it becomes an asset that has benefits, both *tangible* and *intangible* (Setiadi, 2023). The corporate image encompasses the entire company, not only products but also services (Syahputra, 2018). While *tangible* refers to direct benefits and affects the company's profitability, while *intangible* provides indirect benefits to the company's profitability. The intangible

aspect is part of the service characteristics, including Batik Air's services to its customers. This is because services are not in the form of physical assets (*tangible*) but have a dominant positive impact in a company.

From the interviews with the three informants, they have diverse experiences in conveying communication messages to passengers from different cultures and languages. However, regardless of the conditions, flight attendants are obliged to provide satisfactory communication services to all passengers, as in their responses as follows:

I think so far is pretty good, it's just that sometimes there are some conditions where, my communication cannot be in the same direction (not in line, **pen**) with the passengers. Most people like this don't follow the rules of the flight (A. Anantika, Personal Communication, May 31, 2024).

What Aulia Anantika explained is the aspect of *situated knowledge*. He sees and analyzes things based on what he knows. In terms of *standpoint* or point of view, Aulia also identifies her mind with something according to what she felt and experienced in the previous time so that she understands her identity compared to others, especially passengers.

My communication is very good but sometimes obstacles occur on some flight routes from small areas such as Siborong-borong where many passengers do not speak Indonesian but the regional language (A. Wulandari, Personal Communication, May 31, 2024).

Similarly with Ayu Wulandari, she must understand the passengers after realizing her *situated knowledge*. This makes it easier for him to build communication so that what he conveys becomes more effective so that he can satisfy the passengers. The ability to speak Indonesian, which is not possessed by many people, especially from the regions, is a point for Ayu Wulandari to study and build communication.

I think my communication is good and effective. I prioritize direct communication with passengers. So during the communication process, I first understood what the passengers' obstacles were. Usually the strategy I use, depending on the situation during the flight. For example, when I was on a flight, I saw that there were passengers who were uncomfortable, so I came directly and I asked what the problem was. Then I will offer you what options later, usually I find that most often passengers experience abdominal pain and earache during the flight. I gave the choice of hot tea. Then usually if there is a female passenger with a baby, I will monitor the mother's condition more often. So when the baby is fussy, I can quickly help the baby. The point is just to see the condition, then I'll ask again" (Y.S. E. Lestari, Personal Communication, May 31, 2024).

The same thing also happened to Yunita Sri Endah Lestari, in the aspect of *situated knowledge*, she tried to understand passengers so that she found effective communication in serving customers.

The results of the interviews also showed that the three had different ways of communicating messages that were considered effective. For example, the way

of communication carried out by Aulia Anantika, she implements two-way communication when dealing with customers who do not comply with the rules. Meanwhile, Ayu Wulandari tried to implement communication that could be understood by passengers from areas that could not use Indonesian.

Aulia wants to show that with her knowledge and experience she can solve the problems she faces. He can also adapt situations and contexts when communicating. This shows that the solution of public problems can be solved without distinguishing between men and women.

In this case, language has an important role in shaping perceptions, understandings, and mutual agreements about women and men, in accordance with cultural values and perspectives (Wood, 2008).

In contrast to Yunita Sri Endah Lestari who is proactive in serving customers. He does not only wait for customers to complain first, but looks at the attitude, reaction, situation and condition of customers when using Batik Air services. This proactive attitude is believed to be able to make customers feel satisfied.

Communication can be concluded as a systematic planning chain that also considers conditions, situations, outcomes, and evaluations in the communication process (Argestya & Anisa Rohmah Afiati, 2022). Research results from

Yaseen & Amin (2017) is stated that biological differences in the use of communication, especially in social, physical, and psychological factors, have obtained different results.

If effective communication is used correctly, then the professional service of a flight attendant can be optimal. This can help airlines in improving customer or passenger satisfaction and maintaining the airline's image, through flight attendants. As the results of research conducted by Karwur & Ceasarany (2020) which found that there was a significant influence between the quality of flight attendant service and passenger satisfaction of Batik Air. Service quality affects customer satisfaction and has a very high correlation with a figure of 79.6% with the remaining 20.4% influenced by other factors.

On the other hand, communication inequality in the world of work can hinder the work process and even career. Communication equality does not look at whether it is a man or a woman because both have a role in building gender in society (Ardiyanto, 2021)

A communication has proven to be effective in improving the professional service carried out by flight attendants. This refutes the common view of women's perceived inferior performance to men. Even though they were on the way, the informants admitted that there were acts of violating norms carried out by several passengers. However, this is the biggest challenge for flight attendants in their

careers in the aviation world because the results of interviews with informants are as follows:

There are still many obstacles, especially related to the roles and responsibilities of flight attendants, so that many flight attendants take over the duties of flight attendants or passengers, such as placing and lifting passengers' luggage. In addition, some people view flight attendants as having a high lifestyle. During my time as a flight attendant, I also experienced verbal harassment from passengers (A. Wulandari, Communication, Mei 31, 2024).

What Ayu Wulandari experienced is clear that in the aspect of *the sexual division of labour*, she is in a patriarchal situation that sees women as subordinate, both in the public and domestic spheres, and in this case in the scope of work.

Harassment in the world of work is often experienced by women, as well as men. However, in her case, verbal abuse and severe abuse are found in many women. Sexual harassment is a tangible form of gender inequality, as well as tangible evidence of the abuse of power from male sexuality that results in women experiencing unfair treatment and being deprived of their rights. Harassment does not occur in a closed scope, but it also occurs in open spaces, even in the workplace (Paradiatz & Soponyono, 2022).

The dilemma for women working in companies that serve many transgender customers is when they experience sexual harassment, both verbally and touchingly and the like, including women who work

in airlines such as flight attendants. On the one hand, he has to be professional but on the other hand he has to accept the fact that there are still many customers or passengers who harass him. This is a psychological burden for flight attendants. Such as research conducted by Rasji, Limanto, and Setiadi (2023) to train passengers that sexual harassment can harm the physical and psychological harm of the victim or morality in human dignity.

Women's deep-rooted views and their narrow space of movement make women reluctant, afraid, and ashamed when what they do is considered contrary to nature (Putri, 2021). Therefore, to serve customers from various situations and customer conditions is a challenge for a Batik Air flight attendant.

CONCLUSION

Gender-based communication carried out by Batik Air flight attendants refers to the three aspects as in *the standpoint* theory. Flight attendants realize that their existence as women is always differentiated, both in the world of work and in the public (social) view. What flight attendants experience with their customers is a patriarchal practice that has been structured so that they strive to build communication that can be accepted by customers.

Meanwhile, from the description of the three aspects of *standpoint theory*, namely *standpoint*, *situated knowledge*,

and *sexual division of labor* that are inherent in flight attendants, both their experience and knowledge during work, make it easier for them to build communication with customers, which *incidentally* come from diverse backgrounds.

Flight attendants are the airline's brand image, representing the company's commitment to safety and professional service. However, gender discrimination still exists in the workplace. Nonetheless, flight attendants serve as a representation of the airline's service and professional image, ensuring effective communication as well as an understanding of the situation and conditions of the customer or passenger.

Future research that needs to be developed is to measure effectiveness based on a quantitative approach to gender communication.

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