**Shafag Alafsar Nasibova**
Mingechaur Tourism Collage
teacher
nesibovasefeq471@gmail.com

# BUSINESS AND ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION IN TOURISM

## Abstract

Tourism service providers need to have expressive communication skills to be able to offer a better tourism product and create a pleasant tourist experience. To better understand, conceptualize, and achieve the multidimensional concept of communication skills, this paper aims to investigate the literature and propose a measurement scale adapted to the modern tourism workplace. Results, based on a literature review and questionnaire survey, show that five communication skill dimensions emerge: written, oral, listening, digital, and non-verbal communication skills. The paper's theoretical contribution is the systematization of the literature and the conceptualization of communication skills up to date, while its empirical contribution is based on the examination of collected data related to the validated scale measurement.
*Key words: communication, skills tourism, employees tourism, workplace*

**Şəfəq Ələfsər qızı Nəsibova**

## Turizm sahəsində işgüzar və akademik kommunikasiya
### Xülasə

Turizm xidməti təminatçıları daha yaxşı turizm məhsulu təklif etmək və xoş turist təcrübəsi yaratmaq üçün akademik ünsiyyət bacarıqlarına malik olmalıdırlar. Ünsiyyət bacarıqlarının çoxölçülü konsepsiyasını daha yaxşı başa düşmək, konseptuallaşdırmaq və əldə etmək üçün bu məqalə ədəbiyyatı araşdırmaq və müasir turizm iş yerinə uyğunlaşdırılmış ölçmə şkalası təklif etmək məqsədi daşıyır. Ədəbiyyat araşdırmasına və sorğu anketinə əsaslanan nəticələr göstərir ki, beş ünsiyyət bacarığı ölçüsü ortaya çıxır: yazılı, şifahi, dinləmə, rəqəmsal və şifahi olmayan ünsiyyət bacarıqları. Məqalənin nəzəri töhfəsi ədəbiyyatın sistemləşdirilməsi və müasir ünsiyyət bacarıqlarının konseptuallaşdırılmasıdır, onun empirik töhfəsi təsdiqlənmiş miqyaslı ölçmə ilə bağlı toplanmış məlumatların araşdırılmasına əsaslanır.
*Açar sözlər: ünsiyyət, turizm, akademik ünsiyyət, işgüzar kommunikasiya*

## Introduction

Communication skills have been identified as one of the crucial factors of modern businesses, and this has been confirmed by numerous studies conducted so far. Although professional knowledge is essential for work efficiency, research shows that possessing only technical skills has become insufficient to meet the challenges of today's business environment (Robles, 2012:78). Namely, employers are no longer interested in individuals who possess only specific skills but lack other significant skills, particularly soft skills (Binsaeed et al., 2016:89). According to Andrews and Higson (2008), soft skills refer to interpersonal skills, dealing with people and attitudes, which enhance business efficiency and interpersonal relations. While investigating the managers' perspective, Robles (2012) distinguished the top ten soft skills necessary in business, with communication skills ranked in second place, right after integrity.

Effective business communication is a prerequisite for the successful performance of any company; however, its importance is particularly evident in the service industry, where it is the essence of the service business. When it comes to tourism and hospitality, the significance of communication is even greater because communication in tourism goes far beyond conveying information and it has a much deeper meaning, especially in the interaction between tourists and employees the most important soft skill in tourism is communication. Research shows that hospitality managers spend as much as 80% of their day interpersonally communicating with others, and their communication greatly affects employee job satisfaction (Paksoy et al., 2017: 89). On the other hand, Go et al. (1996) highlighted the employees

in direct contact with guests as being the most important ones, and proposed a new organizational structure model in the shape of a reversed pyramid. Accordingly, all tourism employees have to be able to maintain efficient communication with guests, colleagues and all other stakeholders at all levels to maintain a positive business environment (Lolli, 2013:78).

Numerous studies have discussed the importance of business communication; however, previous research has mostly focused on the general aspects of interpersonal communication rather than on specific types of communication skills. Hence, existing studies mostly observe communication skills as a part of the soft skills set, measuring them with a single item, while the ones examining specific communication skills are present in the considerably smaller scope, particularly those concerning the tourism workplace. Furthermore, it would appear that the literature that deals with communication skills has investigated them based on their outcomes or business activities, neglecting the way the message is conveyed.

However, thus far no consensus has been reached in the literature concerning the operationalization of this construct. Hence, further research with an emphasis on different forms of verbal and non-verbal communication skills is needed (Chairat, 2016:29). However, these skills go far beyond typically researched oral and written communication and should be adapted to the needs of a modern workplace. Communication implies both what is said and how it is said (Schroth, 2019:56), indicating, therefore, the need for including non-verbal communication skills, which have often been overlooked by researchers. Since tourism is a people-based industry, listening has been commonly emphasized as a crucial skill needed in the tourism workplace, although less often included in communication scales. Furthermore, it should be noted that required skills in tourism change over time (Raybould, Wilkins, 2006: 55).

Due to the significant technological advancements, tourism is nowadays inseparable from technology, requiring hence some new digital skills from tourism employees. Although digital skills in tourism have already been researched, they are observed from a general rather than a communication perspective. No research to date has incorporated these groups of communication skills based on the manner of message transmission, nor research them in the tourism context. Hence, due to the limited coverage of skills, lack of tourism focus, and constant changes in skills' requirements, the previously proposed scales cannot fully represent the skills required in the modern tourism workplace. To fill this gap, this research intends to determine the extensive set of communication skills required for today's work in tourism, based on the manner of message transmission. The paper aims at identifying, testing, and incorporating into scale five aforementioned groups of communication skills derived from the literature.

Employees in tourism and hospitality should be carefully recruited and need to receive continuous training, because their communication skills are an important indicator in generating positive interaction with customers (Cuic Tankovic, 2020). For tourism employees the ability to communicate properly is one of their most important skills because it has become a vital part of the everyday operations of the tourism business (Brownell, 2016; Lolli, 2013:78).

The relevance of communication skills has been discussed in several tourism-related studies, which highlight them as one of the most important skills for future tourism employees (Wang et al., 2009; Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009:55). Conversely, some other studies have shown that new tourism employees do not possess communication skills to a sufficient extent indicating, therefore, the need for further research on this subject to enhance its understanding. Notwithstanding the importance of communication skills for future of encounters in tourism, some authors have documented considerable flaws in the communication skills of tourism employees.

While there is a growing research on importance of communication skills from various perspectives, the number of studies that examine communication skills with regard to the way messages are conveyed is considerably smaller.

Communication styles and skills are composed of a variety of dimensions and attributes (Kang, Hyun, 2012; Norton, 1978:55) and include a multitude of nonverbal elements that complement or change the meaning of a verbal message. Although verbal communication skills are the most common among researchers, Drucker claims that the most important thing in communication is to hear what is not being told, in other words, to observe one's non-verbal communication. Namely, this form of

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communication is considered to account for almost 70% of total communication and it is reflected through communication environment, physical characteristics of communicator and body movements (Knapp et al., 2014:55). It is especially important in the service industry since the physical appearance of personnel affects the perception of their courtesy and credibility. Due to its complexity, the measurement of non-verbal communication represents a challenge for researchers.

The modern business environment, digitalization, and social media growth point to the need for developing new communication skills that follow the technological changes of contemporary business but go beyond technical and computer skills (Van Laar et al., 2017:45). In this digital world, writing is more important than ever because digital media require more written communication and employees' skills are always exposed to the public due to the influence of the Internet (Guffey & Loewy, 2016:55).

Digital literacy is necessary and means more than the ability to use software or digital devices. It includes a range of complex cognitive, motor, social and emotional skills that users need to function efficiently in a digital environment (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004:43). Due to the transparency that the Internet entails, the communication skills of employees, are always exposed to the public, thus increasing their importance (Guffey & Loewy, 2016:88). Involving a range of complex cognitive, motor, social and emotional skills that users need to function effectively in a digital environment (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004:89), digital communication skills also have to be applied in classical communication tools, which are becoming interactive due to the transformation in adapting to contemporary media.

The scientific literature indicates that possessing all the above-mentioned communication skills is highly important for success in today's workplace; however, their measurement represents a significant challenge for researchers and business professionals alike. According to Spitzberg (2015:42), most of the debate regarding the criteria of interpersonal communication skills focuses on a relatively small number of evaluative dimensions, leaving the measurement of communication skills undefined. While multiple scales for the assessment of written and oral communication skills have been developed, there is still insufficient understanding of the measurement of other communication skills, which have also proved to be highly significant. A new comprehensive measurement scale will help the understanding of the importance of communication skills and their evaluation.

To fully understand the communication skills needed for tourism employees, the communication skills sets used previously need to be expanded by observing them more broadly than focusing solely on the conventional written and oral communication skills. According to the literature review, five dimensions, comprising a total of 46 items, were identified. The five dimensions represent five core types of communication skills, while the items were generated to represent specific communication skills sets required in the tourism workplace.

A questionnaire was designed based on an extensive review of the literature dealing with the communication skills needed in today's workplace.

Since the paper aims to present a scale to measure the importance of communication skills for future tourism employees, purposive sampling was chosen. Namely, the target population of the study were tourism and hospitality students as future tourism employees.

The questionnaire was administered to all full-time students at the Faculty of Tourism during their class periods. The research was conducted between the January 2019 and 2020, and both undergraduate and graduate students participated in the survey. The chosen sample is considered adequate because students represent the future employees in tourism and they are aware of the theoretical knowledge about the importance of communication nowadays in tourism, acquired during the Communication courses.

To test the communication skills scale, the collected data were analysed in three steps. In the first step, univariate and multivariate outliers were evaluated, manifest variables were tested for univariate and multivariate normality of distribution, and the presence of common method variance was assessed. Exploratory factor analysis was performed in the second step to identify the initial dimensions of communication skills. Lastly, confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test the internal consistency reliability, the convergent validity and the discriminant validity of the measurement scales, and the final communication skills scale was designed.

All indicator variables were evaluated for univariate and multivariate outliers. The conducted analysis of standardised values of the individual manifest variables showed there were no values

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significantly more than ±3 standard deviations away from the mean. Furthermore, as no significant multivariate outliers were detected using the Mahalanobis distance, the data for all 468 respondents were retained. Kurtosis and Skewness values were calculated to assess the univariate normality of distribution of indicator variables. Kurtosis values for most of the variables were greater than 3, while Skewness values for all variables were negative, indicating that the data did not have a univariate normal distribution. The Mardia-based Kappa, used to assess the multivariate normal distribution of indicator variables, was 842.09 and statistically significant (C.r. =169.55; p < 0.05), meaning that the data did not have a multivariate normal distribution. For these reasons, the Satorra and Bentler (1994) parameter correction was used in conducting confirmatory factor analysis.

The presence of common method variance, the systematic variance shared among the analysed variables, was assessed, considering that the data for all variables were collected from the same sources through a self-reported questionnaire (Jakobsen & Jensen, 2015). Common method bias can distort the validity of research results with regard to the relationship between latent variables, thus creating a systematic bias by inflating or deflating correlations (Reio, 2010:109). Hence, to ensure valid research results, it is recommended to test for common method bias using a variety of methods (Podsakoff et al., 2003:43). In this study, procedural and statistical methods were applied to reduce common method bias and its effect on the results of research. As the measurement scale test sought to obtain judgements on communication competencies, there was a possibility that some of the participants could try to provide socially acceptable responses. Hence, during the survey, respondents were guaranteed full anonymity and were told there are no right or wrong answers. Moreover, certain dimensions of the communication skills scale were visually separated. The statistical methods used to identify and control for common method bias were Harman's Single-Factor Test and the unmeasured latent factor. In Harman's Single-Factor Test all variables of the individual dimensions were included in factor analysis, and 6 factors were extracted using principal component analysis. The first factor explained 43.50% of variance of all variables. In other words, the conducted test indicated that there was no single factor emerging from the study and that common method bias was not a particularly serious issue in the proposed study. As Harman's Single-Factor test is considered an insensitive test (Podsakoff et al., 2003:55), the unmeasured latent factor method was applied. This method allows all indicator variables to load on related dimensions and on the latent unmeasured factor. The advantage of this method is that the researcher does not need to include additional variables to the study to measure common method bias. The method also models the effect of the method factor on the measurement levels rather than on the latent construct they represent (Podsakoff et al., 2003:89). To facilitate the identification of the final model, all parameters of the unmeasured latent factor were constrained to be equal. The results show the unmeasured latent factor parameter was 0.38 and common variance among variables was 14.43. Based on these results it was concluded that common method bias did not have a significant effect on research results and was not an issue in this study.

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to better define the dimensions of the communication skills scale, that is, to purify the scale. Principal components analysis was used as the factor extraction method, and factor rotation was carried out with the Varimax method.

## Conclusion

Despite attempts to impartially analyze the selected literature on communication skills and apply the selected methodology, this study has some limitations, which suggest directions for future research. First, the sample used in the study included only students of Faculties of Economics and Tourism. To be able to generalise results and to re-test the full scale with its original 46 items and the expanded scale resulting from exploratory factor analysis, future studies could include other potential respondents such as secondary school students and tourism workers. Also, measuring the importance of communication skills of a tourism worker from the tourists point of view would benefit the analysis of the influence of communication skills on the perceived service. Further research should be conducted with tourism employers, but also with tourists, to understand how important these dimensions of communication are. Since this study was conducted on a sample of university students, the results of future studies should be compared with other audiences for whom communication skills are critical to employment and career development. Furthermore, research could be extended to cover other cultural settings to see whether

differences exist in the perception of competencies. On the other side, the present study did not consider the aspect of management that also has a role in the communication skills assessment of employees. The ability of respondents to answer independently depending on their understanding of the meaning of all the proposed items also needs further investigation. Therefore, researchers should adopt a mixed methods approach where respondents should demonstrate and express their actual communication skills. Such qualitative data can be analysed by a communication expert. Also, the predictive ability of the scale was not tested relative to certain important dependent variables. Namely, communication skills should have an impact on improving personal and business relationships, motivating employees, building one's own image and the image of the service organization, enhancing job satisfaction, enhancing the satisfaction of service users, etc. Hence, it would be interesting to test the scale in different situations and settings to examine, for example, whether different degrees of communications skills can affect loyalty or help to win back unsatisfied service users, or how communication skills could enhance the functional and emotional components of service value, thus helping to maintain relationships with users. In addition, future research could focus on examining the effect of perceived communication skills on employability, entrepreneurial intention, or career development.

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