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Measuring the importance of communication skills in tourism

Ana Cuic Tankovic[a], Jelena Kapeš[a] and Dragan Benazić[b]

[a]Faculty of Tourism and Hospitality Management, University of Rijeka, Opatija, Croatia; [b]Faculty of Economics and Tourism "Dr Mijo Mirkovic", Juraj Dobrila University of Pula, Pula, Croatia

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. The scale presented in this paper will assist future empirical research on communication skills required in the field of tourism. The paper will help generate novel research questions for identifying and analyzing acquired communication skills.

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1. 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 (Goby, 2007; Halfhill & Nielsen, 2007; Lim et al., 2016; Plant & Slippers, 2015; Robles, 2012; Shuayto, 2013; Wang et al., 2009; Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009). 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). 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). 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

CONTACT Ana Cuic Tankovic anact@fthm.hr

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 (Jameson, 2007; Lolli, 2013a; Nikolich & Sparks, 1995). Moreover, according to Wesley et al. (2017), 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 (Woods & King, 2010, as cited in Lolli, 2013b), and their communication greatly affects employee job satisfaction (Paksoy et al., 2017). 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, 2013a).

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 (Baird & Parayitam, 2019; Robles, 2012; Wesley et al., 2017), 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. For instance, Conrad and Newberry (2012) investigated the most important communication skills in business, based on desired communication outcomes, by categorizing them into three main groups: (1) organizational, (2) leadership and (3) interpersonal communication skills. Using a similar approach, Waldeck et al. (2012) categorised communication skills into six main groups: (1) relationship and interpersonal communication, (2) mediated communication, (3) intergroup communication, (4) communication of enthusiasm, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit, (5) non-verbal communication, and (6) speaking and listening. 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). 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), 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 (Lolli, 2013a; Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009), although less often included in communication scales.

Furthermore, it should be noted that required skills in tourism change over time (Raybould & Wilkins, 2006). 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 (Carlisle et al., 2021), 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. By integrating listening skills (Brownell, 2009; Lamb-White, 2008; Lolli, 2013a), non-verbal communication skills (Knapp et al., 2014; Sundaram & Webster, 2000; Uzun, 2017), and digital skills (Guffey & Loewy, 2016; Eshet-Alkalai, 2004; Van Laar et al., 2017) to extensively used oral communication skills (Gray & Murray, 2011; Jackson, 2014; MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017) and written communication skills (Jones, 2011; Kleckner & Marshall, 2014; Morgan, 1997), this research will present an extended and comprehensive communication scale measuring the importance of communication skills for future tourism employees. Since these skills will be even more important in the future (Hsu, 2018), a comprehensive scale is needed to help future researchers, tourism practitioners, and tourism educators to better understand, assess and develop specific communication skills.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Communication skills in tourism

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, 2013a).

While communication in tourism can be considered as being mostly external, internal communication helps to reinforce employee satisfaction, which impacts guest satisfaction (Ryan et al., 1996), by encompassing the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and messages in order to issue information and instructions, persuade employees, coordinate activities, develop products and services, and evaluate and reward employees (Guffey & Loewy, 2010). Combined with external and internal communication, interpersonal communication in tourism is characterized by a high level of personal connectivity (Zhu et al., 2006), where participants are linked individually and create messages, taking into account the specific psychological characteristics of another person (Burleson, 2010) and often including the feelings of individuals (Zhu et al., 2006).

In this way, interpersonal communication occurring in the tourism process engages the persons involved through voluntary and interdependent interactions of meaningful verbal or nonverbal messages. This kind of communication is realized through two-way communication channels and often through direct personal contact and is considered significant by all parties.

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). Conversely, some other studies have shown that new tourism employees do not possess communication skills to a sufficient extent (Lolli, 2013b; Stevens, 2005; Paranto & Kelkar, 2000), 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 (Peterson, 1997; Bednar & Olney, 1987).

2.2. Written and oral communication skills

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. Existing studies mostly have focused on written communication skills (Jones, 2011; Kleckner & Marshall, 2014; MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017; Morgan, 1997; Swenson, 1980; Waner, 1995) and oral communication skills (Dunbar et al., 2006; Gray & Murray, 2011; Jackson, 2014; Kleckner & Marshall, 2014; Lolli, 2013a; MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017; Morgan, 1997; Swenson, 1980; Ulinski & O'callaghan, 2002; Waner, 1995). These skills undoubtedly are the foundation of literacy and a prerequisite of any business communication, although Stevens (2005) stresses that oral communication skills are lacking in young employees. Multiple scales for written and oral communication skills were developed from the perspective of various professions and stakeholders. It appears, however, that these skills are not sufficient to satisfy modern business needs, thus requiring an expansion of the previously used communication skills set.

2.3. Listening communication skills

Besides writing and speaking, listening skills are considered as one of the most important components of interpersonal communication (Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Brownell, 2009; Clokie & Fourie, 2016; Lamb-White, 2008; Lolli, 2013a; Maes et al., 1997; Morgan, 1997; Ulinski & O'callaghan, 2002; Waner, 1995; Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009). It is considered that a higher hierarchical level increases listening responsibility (Bisen & Priya, 2009). Namely, research shows that managers spend more than 80% of their workday listening (Lamb-White, 2008, as cited in Lolli, 2013a). Listening communication skills imply the process of receiving, interpreting and responding to the message received by the sender (Bisen & Priya, 2009) and is considered the most important and most frequent communication activity in business communication (Keyton et al., 2013). Listening skills remain neglected because the

process of listening is a natural one: while hearing is a purely physical process, listening is a mental process that involves interpreting and understanding a message (Krizan et al., 2008). It is considered that listening efficiency is between 25% and 50%, which means that 50% to 75% of the spoken information is ignored, forgotten or misunderstood (Guffey & Loewy, 2016). A framework for listening skills was developed by Brownell (1996), including six major components of the listening process, which can be used as a suitable measurement tool for listening assessment.

2.4. Non-verbal communication skills

Communication styles and skills are composed of a variety of dimensions and attributes (Kang & Hyun, 2012; Norton, 1978) 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 (1989, as cited in Ratcliffe, 2016) 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 communication is considered to account for almost 70% of total communication (Barnum & Wolniansky, 1989, as cited in Sundaram & Webster, 2000) and it is reflected through communication environment, physical characteristics of communicator and body movements (Knapp et al., 2014). It is especially important in the service industry since the physical appearance of personnel affects the perception of their courtesy and credibility (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). Due to its complexity, the measurement of non-verbal communication represents a challenge for researchers. Uzun (2017) has developed an extensive non-verbal communication scale while Leigh and Summers (2002) and Limbu et al. (2016) have focused on non-verbal cues of the salesperson. On the other hand, Lolli (2013a) has narrowed the non-verbal skills to those important in the hospitality industry. However, despite their indisputable importance, these skills remain understudied, and no consensus regarding their operationalization has been reached.

2.5. Digital skills

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). 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). Moore and Morton (2017) stressed the inability to adapt the message to a particular situational context, where new employees lack adequate communication skills.

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). 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). Involving a range of complex cognitive, motor, social and emotional skills that users need to function effectively in a digital environment (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004), 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. Modern communication media allow two-way communication at three levels: one to one, one to many, and many to many (Jenkins, 2010). The significance of this area is deemed to grow considerably in the future, meaning that a higher level of competency will be needed in this field and that the necessary skills will also need to be precisely defined (Johanson et al., 2011; Carlisle et al., 2021; Coffelt et al., 2019).

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), 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.

Although Forsyth et al. (1999) developed a model for assessing general communication and interaction skills (ACIS), the assessment of business communication, especially in tourism, requires a more specific approach. Some other researchers have measured communication skills related to business performance (Clokie & Fourie, 2016; Coffelt et al., 2019; Schartel Dunn & Lane, 2019; Stevens, 2005; Ulinski & O'callaghan, 2002) or specific areas of tourism and hospitality (Lolli, 2013b; Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009) but since they mostly include only a few types of communication skills, there is still insufficient understanding of communication skills measurement (Zerfass et al., 2017). Therefore, to fill this gap, this research brings together all the most important categories of communication skills according to the review of scientific literature, and seeks to integrate them into a unique measuring instrument.

3. Methodology

3.1. Scale development

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. The first dimension

refers to written communication skills and consists of nine items adapted from Jones (2011) and Morgan (1997). The second dimension examines oral communication skills, and includes 11 items compiled from several relevant studies (Jackson, 2014; Morgan, 1997; Lolli, 2013a; Gray & Murray, 2011; Ulinski & O'callaghan, 2002). The third dimension is based on Brownells HURIER model and explores listening skills through six items. The fourth dimension refers to digital communication skills and includes nine items adopted from Siddiq et al. (2016), Jones (2011), and Ferrari Ferrari, Ferrari, (2014). The last, fifth dimension represents non-verbal communication skills and the eleven items used were adopted from several related studies (Limbu et al., 2016; Leigh & Summers, 2002; Lolli, 2013a; Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008; Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009).

For all items, participants' opinions were rated using a 5-point Likert scale, indicating their perceived importance of specific skills for working in tourism (1 – extremely unimportant, 5 – extremely important).

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. Finally, a total of 468 valid questionnaires were obtained and included in further analysis. The structure of respondents shows that 77% were female and 23% male. The majority, 56% of respondents were 19 to 21 years old, followed by those aged 22-25 (41%). Just 2% were aged 26–30 and 1% were 17 to 18 years old. Moreover, 81,42% of the respondents have working experience in the tourism sector, for an average of 25,6 months in this field.

4. Data analysis

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.

4.1. Characteristics of collected data

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 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.

4.2. Common method bias

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). Hence, to ensure valid research results, it is recommended to test for common method bias using a variety of methods (Podsakoff et al., 2003). 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), 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). 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.

4.3. Exploratory factor analysis

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. Bartlett's test of sphericity (10219.12; df = 630, $p < 0.05$) and the KMO measure of sampling adequacy (KMO = 0.96) indicated that the application of factor analysis to the studied data set was possible and appropriate. The final factor analysis, presented in Table 1, confirmed the presence of five dimensions of the communication skills scale. Eliminated from the final factor analysis were variables whose factor loadings correlated to multiple factors and variables with a very low factor loading (below 0.5).

Upon rotation, 60.69% of variance of all variables was explained, which is acceptable given the exploratory character of the study. Based on exploratory factor analysis, 10 variables were eliminated, namely 2 variables in the dimension Written communication skills- WCS (WCS8 and WCS9), 5 variables of Oral communication skills- OCS (OCS7, OCS8, OCS9, OCS10 and OCS11) and 3 variables of Digital communication skills- DCS (DCS7, DCS8, DCS9). To obtain the final model of the communication skills scale, confirmatory factor analysis was performed after the exploratory analysis.

4.4. Confirmatory factor analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis is performed to confirm the internal consistency reliability, the convergent validity and the discriminant validity of the measurement scale. The initial model of confirmatory factor analysis with 36 items did not meet the conditions for the convergent and discriminant validity or the internal consistency reliability of the individual variables. To obtain a better fit of the model to the data, certain variables were eliminated one by one. Upon each elimination, C.R. and AVE values were re-estimated, together with item loadings, the discriminant validity criterion and model quality indicators (CFI, TLI, RMSEA and SRMR). As stated earlier, the Satorra and Bentler (1994) parameter correction procedure was used due to the violation of assumptions of univariate and multivariate distribution normality. Modification indexes were used in eliminating variables and those variables that had a great improvement in the Chi Square indicator of model quality were removed.

Upon confirmatory analysis, an additional 16 variables were eliminated from the final communication skills scale, namely 4 variables of the dimension "Written communication skills", 3 variables of the dimension "Oral communication skills", 3 variables of the dimension "Listening communication skills" and 2 variables each from the remaining two dimensions "Digital communication skills" and "Non-verbal communication skills". Although the final number of eliminated variables is significant, it is acceptable given the exploratory character and features of this study. Furthermore, subsequent content analysis established the presence of possible overlaps among items of certain aspects of specific dimensions of communication skills. For example, in the

Table 1. Exploratory factor analysis of communication skills scale.

Variable		$\bar{X}$	SD	NVCS	WCS	LCS	DCS	OCS
Writing clearly and precisely.	WCS1	4.27	0.038	0.105	**0.686**	0.116	0.253	0.040
Using an effective business vocabulary.	WCS2	4.37	0.036	0.193	**0.598**	0.079	0.196	0.258
The use of correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.	WCS3	4.53	0.035	0.222	**0.644**	0.063	0.148	0.237
Preparing documents that are concise, accurate, and supportive of the subject matter.	WCS4	4.47	0.033	0.134	**0.613**	0.203	0.240	0.177
Presentation of ideas and information in a clear and logical sequence	WCS5	4.56	0.030	0.169	**0.592**	0.225	0.249	0.186
Ability to adjust writing styles for different audiences.	WCS6	4.41	0.036	0.250	**0.638**	0.257	0.084	0.206
Ability to adjust writing styles for different formats.	WCS7	4.41	0.034	0.247	**0.668**	0.261	0.116	0.177
Ability to develop information networks both informal and formal.	OCS1	4.66	0.030	0.281	0.276	0.336	0.147	**0.558**
Ability to express complex ideas fluently and coherently using extensive vocabulary.	OCS2	4.51	0.033	0.204	0.305	0.046	0.277	**0.668**
Being articulate and using appropriate tone of voice.	OCS3	4.66	0.029	0.350	0.171	0.251	0.147	**0.661**
Ability to produce a clear, systematically developed presentation, on a broad range of subjects.	OCS4	4.51	0.031	0.254	0.271	0.195	0.270	**0.646**
Speaking publicly and adjusting the style according to the nature of the audience.	OCS5	4.66	0.030	0.276	0.288	0.313	0.202	**0.604**
Holding audience's attention/interest.	OCS6	4.53	0.027	0.212	0.183	0.299	0.118	**0.646**
Hearing messages and concentrating on the speaker.	LCS1	4.63	0.028	0.261	0.196	**0.686**	0.189	0.297
Understanding messages and distinguishing main ideas.	LCS2	4.73	0.027	0.311	0.207	**0.635**	0.164	0.312
Remembering messages.	LCS3	4.71	0.030	0.268	0.195	**0.673**	0.196	0.227
Interpreting messages accurately.	LCS4	4.70	0.028	0.379	0.230	**0.661**	0.204	0.114
Evaluating messages and the speaker.	LCS5	4.60	0.029	0.266	0.192	**0.655**	0.231	0.189
Responding to messages.	LCS6	4.67	0.027	0.342	0.260	**0.608**	0.248	0.147
Displaying digital information for a given audience and a specific purpose.	DCS1	4.53	0.029	0.239	0.172	0.228	**0.669**	0.114
Sharing digital information with others.	DCS2	4.47	0.030	0.231	0.213	0.175	**0.752**	0.124
Providing digital feedback.	DCS3	4.48	0.031	0.187	0.248	0.263	**0.711**	0.049
Using computer software to make digital products (for presentations, documents, pictures, and diagrams).	DCS4	4.51	0.033	0.246	0.133	0.243	**0.634**	0.217
Effective use of instant/text messaging.	DCS6	4.44	0.035	0.161	0.204	0.105	**0.606**	0.216
Maintaining a professional presence on social networks.	DCS7	4.52	0.033	0.217	0.210	0.039	**0.616**	0.206
Smiling while talking.	NVCS1	4.73	0.026	**0.652**	0.198	0.174	0.128	0.067
Maintaining eye contact with interlocutors.	NVCS2	4.77	0.023	**0.717**	0.125	0.278	0.218	0.059
Using appropriate gestures while talking.	NVCS3	4.63	0.029	**0.601**	0.202	0.091	0.327	0.262
Using ppropriate formal posture.	NVCS4	4.78	0.024	**0.656**	0.167	0.164	0.241	0.225
Using appropriate professional attire.	NVCS5	4.71	0.026	**0.595**	0.137	0.186	0.240	0.296
Trust building and honesty.	NVCS6	4.66	0.029	**0.706**	0.204	0.193	0.192	0.196
Being truthful and credible.	NVCS7	4.72	0.027	**0.665**	0.142	0.259	0.165	0.207
Displaying self-confidence in communication.	NVCS8	4.72	0.026	**0.703**	0.124	0.254	0.174	0.238
Showing an honest understanding for other people.	NVCS9	4.68	0.029	**0.709**	0.290	0.195	0.145	0.044
Showing empathy in communication.	NVCS10	4.65	0.030	**0.690**	0.112	0.134	0.090	0.231
Demonstrating appropriate cultural communication skills.	NVCS11	4.76	0.023	**0.617**	0.176	0.213	0.163	0.225
% explained variance after rotation				**17.84**	**11.32**	**10.79**	**10.76**	**9.98**

Factor extraction method: Principal components analysis, Varimax rotation, n = 468.
Source: The authors.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis.

Dimension/item	Standardized loadings*	Z-value	CR	AVE
Written communication skills			0.78	0.55
WCS5	0.683	15.07		
WCS6	0.760	18.40		
WCS7	0.775	28.83		
Oral communication skills			0.82	0.60
OCS2	0.717	18.18		
OCS4	0.809	28.26		
OCS5	0.795	22.42		
Listening communicaiton skills			0.86	0.68
LCS1	0.832	26.42		
LCS2	0.829	28.07		
LCS3	0.804	25.00		
Digital communication skills			0.85	0.58
DCS1	0.759	21.57		
DCS2	0.821	34.58		
DCS3	0.769	22.67		
DCS4	0.701	18.11		
Non-verbal communication skills			0.89	0.55
NVCS2	0.768	17.65		
NVCS3	0.720	19.40		
NVCS5	0.698	12.60		
NVCS6	0.785	27.94		
NVCS7	0.752	18.21		
NVCS9	0.750	19.28		
NVCS11	0.698	12.38		

*Satorra-Bentler Correction.
**$p < 0.05$.
CR = composite reliability; Ave = Average variance extracted.
Source: The authors.

dimension "Written communication skills", overlapping is likely between WCS1 – "Writing clearly and precisely" and WCS5 - "Providing information and ideas in a clear, ordered and effective pattern". Similar overlapping can also be found in the other dimensions but are not mentioned here due to limited space. Table 2 presents the final results of confirmatory factor analysis.

The Goodness of Fit indexes of the final model, taking into account the Satorra and Bentler (1994) correction, indicate a satisfactory fit to empirical data, consistent with the recommendations of Hu and Bentler (1999). The Chi Square/df indicator is 1.12, that is, below 3.5. The values of CFI and TLI are both 0.99, higher than the cut-off value of 0.95. The values of RMSEA and SRMR are 0.016 and 0.03, respectively, and are below the critical values of 0.06 for RMSEA and 0.08 for SRMR.

Most of the item standardized loadings were either higher than or very close to the recommended value of 0.7 and their elimination would not have made any significant contribution to improving convergent validity. The size of the established item loadings suggests that the remaining items of the communication skills scale show a satisfactory level of internal consistency reliability. The CR values of the analysed measurement scale ranged from 0.78 to 0.89, and the AVE values of all scale dimensions were above 0.5, and ranged from 0.55 to 0.68. Hence, it can be concluded that the measurement scale shows a satisfactory level of convergent validity. Upon testing for convergent validity, the measurement scale was tested for discriminant

Table 3. Discriminant validity.

	Written communication skills	Oral communication skills	Listening communication skills	Digital communication skills	Non-verbal communication skills
Written communication skills	**0.741**				
Oral communication skills	0.757 (0.766)	**0.775**			
Listening communication skills	0.687 (0.693)	0.732 (0.726)	**0.824**		
Digital communication skills	0.645 (0.665)	0.683 (0.695)	0.628 (0.640)	**0.762**	
Non-verbal communication skills	0.684 (0.691)	0.732 (0.737)	0.739 (0.742)	0.683 (0.694)	**0.741**

(HTMT ratio).
Source: The authors.

validity using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (1981) and the Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of the correlation (Henseler et al., 2015). Table 3 presents the results of discriminant validity analysis of the communication skills scale.

The square roots of AVE of the dimensions of the communication skills scale are larger than the correlation coefficients of each individual dimension with all other dimensions of the communication skills scale, with the exception of the dimensions "Written communication skills" and "Oral communication skills"; thus, the Fornell-Larcker criterion can be considered only partially fulfilled. Because the criterion gives weaker results in detecting discriminant validity when item loadings range from 0.6 to 0.8 (Voorhees et al., 2016) as is the case in this study, the HTMT ratio was calculated. This indicator represents the average of the heterotrait-heteromethod correlations (the correlations of indicators across constructs measuring different phenomena) relative to the average of the monotrait-heteromethod correlations (correlations of indicators within the same constructs) (Henseler et al., 2015). All HTMT indicators are below 0.9, indicating that the analysed communication skills scale has a satisfactory level of discriminant validity.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This research was conducted in response to recent calls for more research regarding a comprehensive scale of communication skills to facilitate future tourism employees' entering the workplace. Up to date, studies have focused on the communication skills set, emphasizing the importance of communication as a part of soft skills (Wesley et al., 2017; MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017). Unlike previous research, which focuses on the desired outcome or business activities resulting from communication skills (Conrad & Newberry, 2012; Waldeck et al., 2012), this study highlights the importance of how the message is conveyed in the modern workplace and divides communications into five types of proficiency.

The evidence from this paper suggests that communication skills are multidimensional, with the proposed scale for communication skills proving the existence of five dimensions, namely Written communication skills (factor 1), Oral communication skills (factor 2), Listening communication skills (factor 3), Digital communication skills (factor 4), and Non-verbal communication skills (factor 5).

Regarding Written communication skills (factor 1) and Oral communication skills (factor 2), this study confirms that these skills are the prerequisite of business communication, a finding consistent with previous studies (MacDermott & Ortiz, 2017; Kleckner & Marshall, 2014; Jackson, 2014). As expected, Listening communication skills (factor 3) have emerged as an essential component of interpersonal communication, linked to the most common activity in business communication (Keyton et al., 2013), and increased hierarchical responsibilities (Bisen & Priya, 2009) connected to absorbing information through listening. The fourth factor, i.e., Digital communication skills, refers to contemporary challenges beyond technical and computer skills, involving processed digital information used and shared with others, as previously proven by Moore and Morton (2017). Non-verbal communication skills (factor 5) have the highest composite reliability, and just one eliminated variable. This framework has included items referring to the complement of a verbal message, like Smiling while talking, Using appropriate gestures while talking, Using appropriate formal posture, Using appropriate professional attire, and Maintaining eye contact with interlocutors. Besides these supportive elements, this dimension involves other critical elements of the perception of communication, such as Displaying self-confidence in communication, Showing an honest understanding for other people, Showing empathy in communication, and Demonstrating appropriate cultural communication skills, which strongly contribute to the overall importance of communication skills.

To summarise, this study empirically investigates the importance of communication skills for future tourism employees, proposing an integrated scale consisting of five dimensions. This research responds to the nowadays need of the market because up-to-date communication skills have yet to be clearly defined. Therefore, this research aims to analyze specific factors about existing skills, not yet thoroughly researched and implemented in a comprehensive scale. This research gathers new information and provides a better understanding of the communication skills scale, according to the five constructs proposed. In that way, this study will help provide a foundation for future research on communication by identifying new factors of the communication skills set and updating previous theories.

The strength of this work lies in the vast multidimensional scale, which expands the previous measurements with variables of listening skills, non-verbal communication skills, and digital skills. This study investigates communication skills using a broad range of attributes instead of measuring them with a limited set or specific set of items, as is the case in other similar studies. This finding adds to a growing body of literature on communication skills, integrated in the soft skills required for future tourism professionals to enter the world of work. Hence, this paper's conclusions and proposals are of great relevance for tourism managers, helping them get a more complete picture of candidates. Universities can significantly benefit from this study and adapt the proposed curricula to better prepare students for the work market.

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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ORCID

Ana Cuic Tankovic http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4383-684X
Jelena Kapeš http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0563-219X
Dragan Benazić http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5396-3706

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Appendix

Table A1. Constructs of the communication scale.

Constructs	Items	Source
Written communication skills	Writing clearly and precisely.	Jones, 2011
	Using an effective business vocabulary.	
	The use of correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.	Morgan, 1997
	Preparing documents that are concise, accurate, and supportive of the subject matter.	Jones, 2011
	Providing information and ideas in a clear, ordered and effective pattern.	Morgan, 1997
	Ability to adjust writing styles for different audiences.	
	Ability to adjust writing styles for different formats.	
	Including well-designed illustrations, graphs, and tables where appropriate.	Jones, 2011
	Writing internal informal messages.	Morgan, 1997
Oral communication skills	Ability to develop information networks both informal and formal.	
	Ability to express complex ideas fluently and coherently using extensive vocabulary.	Jackson, 2014
	Being articulate and using appropriate tone of voice.	Lolli, 2013a
	Ability to produce a clear, systematically developed presentation, on a broad range of subjects.	Jackson, 2014
	Speaking publicly and adjusting the style according to the nature of the audience.	
	Holding audience's attention/interest.	Gray & Murray, 2011
	Giving feedback appropriately and constructively	Jackson, 2014
	Receiving feedback appropriately and constructively	
	Ability to modify presentation in response to feedback from listeners.	Morgan, 1997
	Possession of negotiation skills.	Ulinski & O'callaghan, 2002

(*continued*)

Table A1. Continued.

Constructs	Items	Source
	Constructive participation in meetings by contributing ideas and suggestions.	Jackson, 2014
Listening communication skills	Hearing messages and concentrating on the speaker.	Brownell, 2010
	Understanding messages and distinguishing main ideas.	
	Remembering messages.	
	Interpreting messages accurately.	
	Evaluating messages and the speaker.	
	Responding to messages.	
Digital communication skills	Displaying digital information for a given audience and a specific purpose.	Siddiq et al., 2016
	Sharing digital information with others.	
	Providing digital feedback.	
	Using computer software to make digital products (for presentations, documents, pictures, and diagrams).	
	Effective use of email for external and internal correspondence.	Jones, 2011
	Effective use of instant/text messaging.	
	Maintaining a professional presence on social networks.	
	Knowledge of netiquette.	Ferrari, 2014
	Understanding the consequences of making digital information available for everyone on the Internet.	Siddiq et al., 2016
Non-verbal communication skills	Smiling while talking.	Limbu et al., 2016
	Maintaining eye contact with interlocutors.	
	Using appropriate gestures while talking.	
	Using appropriate formal posture.	Leigh & Summers, 2002
	Using appropriate professional attire.	
	Trust building and honesty.	Bambacas & Patrickson, 2008
	Being truthful and credible.	Lolli, 2013a
	Displaying self-confidence in communication.	Fisher, Fisher, Fisher, 2011
	Showing an honest understanding for other people.	
	Showing empathy in communication.	Zehrer & Mössenlechner, 2009
	Demonstrating appropriate cultural communication skills.	Lolli, 2013a

Source: The authors.