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THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND POLITENESS ON TOURIST SATISFACTION: EVIDENCE FROM BATAM ISLAND HOTELS

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Abstract: Communication skills, particularly digital competencies and polite behaviour, play a crucial role in enhancing tourists' satisfaction and supporting tourism marketing, ultimately contributing to increased tourist arrivals and economic benefits. This study aimed to examine how tourists search for and select hotels, assess the level of politeness demonstrated by hotel staff, and evaluate the impact of communication skills and politeness on tourists' satisfaction. The research was conducted among hotel guests who stayed in hotels on Batam Island, Indonesia, and focused on five dimensions of communication: written, oral, listening, digital, and non-verbal communication, together with perceived politeness. Data were collected through an online survey of 285 tourists in 2023, using a purposive sampling method. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were employed to analyse the data. The findings indicate that social media platforms and friends' recommendations were the most frequently used methods for finding hotels. When choosing a hotel, tourists placed greater importance on cost, room and bed specifications, and cleanliness. Additional factors influencing tourist satisfaction included hotel scenery, enjoyable experiences, and the establishment of trust, honesty, credibility, and positive interactions with hotel staff. The results reveal significant correlations between communication skills, politeness, and tourist satisfaction. Satisfaction was found to be strongly associated with linguistic politeness and digital communication skills, both of which emerged as strong predictors of hotel guests' satisfaction. Listening communication skills were also a significant predictor; however, they showed a negative relationship with satisfaction. These findings suggest that hospitality organisations should integrate digital communication and politeness training into staff development programmes and implement systematic feedback mechanisms to monitor service quality and guest satisfaction. Overall, this study

provides practical insights that can assist hotel managers in developing effective marketing and service strategies to attract more tourists to Batam Island.

Keywords: *Batam Island, Communication Skills, Hospitality, Politeness Strategies, Satisfaction*

JEL classification: *M30, L83, Z32*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism plays a pivotal role in a country's development by enhancing tourist satisfaction, which subsequently drives tourism growth and boosts the economy. Therefore, an effective communication strategy between hotel guests and tourists is instrumental in increasing tourist arrivals (Achmad et al., 2023; Achmad et al., 2023b; Septiana & Hariyanti, 2023). The significance of external communication in the tourism and hospitality industry is heightened because it involves far more than the mere exchange of information. Language proficiency, digital information and communication skills are critical components that contribute to customer satisfaction. Communication strategies, interpersonal skills and professional attitudes are essential for enhancing tourists' enjoyment and overall satisfaction in the service sector. In addition, employees' politeness strategies significantly influence customers' perceptions of service quality (Lolli, 2013b; Zhang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2006).

As tourism continues to expand rapidly in Indonesia, hospitality professionals must develop effective communication skills to meet industry demands (Rahayu, 2019). Employees' external communication abilities and soft skills such as politeness play a pivotal role in ensuring tourist satisfaction, which is crucial for making guests feel valued and content (Cuic Tankovic et al., 2023). Multiculturalism is a key consideration in the tourism sector (Goby, 2007). Oral communication skills and cross-cultural linguistic politeness must align with the expectations of multicultural and international tourists in order to cater to their needs, as their satisfaction directly impacts hotel performance (Dunbar et al., 2006). Identifying the most effective aspects of customer communication styles is therefore, essential (Kang and Hyun, 2012). Hotel staff should modify their communication skills by employing either negative or positive politeness strategies based on the context, while tour guides must possess exceptional communication skills to satisfy international tourists (Gesimba et al., 2023; Kusumarini, 2021). Consequently, understanding and correctly applying politeness norms is vital for employees (Purnomo, 2014). The friendly, credible, trustworthy and competent behaviour of service employees significantly influences their interactions with customers. Moreover, qualities such as friendliness, responsiveness and enthusiasm positively impact customer satisfaction in the context of how service delivery and quality is perceived (Sundaram & Webster, 2000).

The advancement of digitalization in the tourism sector has led to digital reviews through visitor feedback for prominent tourist destinations becoming an invaluable tool for guiding tourists to their preferred locations (Alamsyah et al., 2024). Hotel staff must cultivate advanced digital skills to address tourists' requirements and enhance their satisfaction. Technical skills alone are insufficient to meet the diverse needs

and expectations of tourists. The performance of any hotel is significantly influenced by its employees' communication skills and politeness. Positive interactions between tourists and staff are essential for ensuring a pleasant and satisfying stay. Specific psychological factors, such as an individual's emotions, should be considered when communicating with hotel guests. Nonverbal communication elements, such as appropriate gestures, formal posture, professional attire and maintaining eye contact, are also critical during interactions. Evaluating the importance of communication skills from a traveller's perspective helps to analyse the influence these skills have on service perceptions. The ability to listen attentively and speak clearly is crucial for performing work-related tasks. Employees in direct contact with guests must be effective communicators in order to create a welcoming and positive environment.

Although there has been a lot of research on customer satisfaction and service quality in the hotel and tourism industry, there is still not much understanding of how different communication skills(written, oral, listening, digital, and non-verbal) —especially digital communication and politeness influence tourists satisfaction. Additionally, while politeness has been acknowledged as a soft skill in service encounters, its empirical relationship with guest satisfaction in the digital communication era remains insufficiently examined. Most studies focus on general service attributes in well-known destinations, overlooking emerging areas such as Batam Island in Indonesia. Furthermore, the empirical relationship between politeness and satisfaction in the digital era is under-researched, as is the link between interpersonal communication and organisational strategies. This study addresses these gaps by examining the relationship between communication skills, politeness and guest satisfaction in the hotel sector on Batam Island. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) ways of finding a hotel and reasons for choosing a hotel (2) analyse communication between staff and tourists; (3) assess staff politeness; (4) evaluate the impact of communication and politeness on satisfaction; and (5) identify key communication predictors of the guest satisfaction. The study makes a theoretical contribution by bringing together different aspects of communication in the field of hospitality research and by highlighting new factors that can influence customer satisfaction. It provides hotel managers with practical, data-driven recommendations for improving guest experience. These recommendations focus on targeted communication and politeness strategies, especially in digital contexts.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Communication, as a vital marketing tool in the tourism sector, is not only about what is said but also how it is expressed. Non-verbal communication (body movements, gestures etc.) and digital communication methods complement oral communication. Wesley et al. (2017) emphasized that communication is a critical skill in tourism. The ability to communicate effectively and engagingly significantly impacts guests' level of enjoyment. As for hotel employees, polite and effective communication with guests, colleagues and managers is essential for a smooth implementation of daily tasks (Carlisle et al., 2021; Dunbar et al., 2006). A lack of communication skills with external customers can significantly hinder the tourism industry, where clear and expressive interaction between hotel staff and customers is essential for smooth and effective engagement (Lolli, 2013; Cuic Tankovic et al., 2023, 2023; Nikolich & Sparks, 1995). In the hotel industry, workers' skills are intangible yet integral aspects of service

delivery and interpersonal relationships with customers, directly influencing service satisfaction (Nikolich & Sparks, 1995).

Key elements of communication include, speaking appropriately, clearly and meaningfully, presenting ideas in a structured manner, active listening, selecting the most suitable communication methods, organizing messages, assessing, understanding and providing well-supported information, as well as using correct grammar, pronunciation and non-verbal cues such as gestures, posture and eye contact (Cuic Tankovic et al., 2023; Carlisle et al., 2021; Dunbar et al., 2006). Communication that contains elements of attentiveness, friendliness, persuasiveness, openness and a relaxed atmosphere enhances customer-oriented employee service that results in positive and productive relationships between hotels' employees and external customers. This approach positively influences long-term customer relationships and enhances financial performance. Non-verbal communication at service counters also complements verbal communication skills, making it an essential attribute in today's competitive tourism sector (Dunbar et al., 2006; Paksoy et al., 2017; Sundaram & Webster, 2000; Zerfass et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2009). Advanced communication skills include argumentation, audience analysis, valuing diverse cultural perspectives, identifying key issues, reasoning effectively and understanding others to manage conflicts. Conversations, traditionally viewed as conflict-free, are most effective when all parties can meet each other's needs and interests (Dunbar et al., 2006; Jones, 1994). Acknowledging customers, greeting them with a smile, and speaking in a sincere and friendly tone help service providers make customers feel valued and appreciated (Kang & Hyun, 2012). Non-verbal communication, including appropriate gestures, formal attire and maintaining eye contact, plays a significant role in interactions with guests (Ferrari, 2014; Waldeck et al., 2012).

Yule (1996) defined politeness as "*a system of interpersonal relations that reduces the possibility of conflict and confrontation present in every human interaction, thereby facilitating engagement*". Politeness strategies involve communication skills that facilitate the exchange of thoughts, ideas and messages to provide clear information and instructions (Chairat, 2016; Ryabova, 2015). Linguistic skills can be categorized into relational/interpersonal communication, mediated/intergroup communication, communication of enthusiasm, creativity, entrepreneurship, non-verbal communication and speaking/listening (Chairat, 2016; Ryabova, 2015). Linguistic style significantly influences the satisfaction of national and international tourists (Almasoodi & Rahman, 2022). Attributes such as attentiveness, politeness, openness and relaxation are beneficial for customer orientation, whereas argumentative tones, harsh refusals or excessive apologies for mistakes negatively impact customer-oriented service (Kang & Hyun, 2012). Verbal and non-verbal messages should align with politeness strategies as a hallmark of hospitality. Business interactions necessitate politeness through two-way communication channels to ensure clarity and avoid miscommunication. Additionally, adjustments in speech speed or volume can enhance understanding (Nikolich & Sparks, 1995).

Written communication skills

Writing, whether in the form of a text or a letter, plays a crucial role in effective communication. In the hotel industry, writing skills are primarily used for email cor-

respondence, note-taking during telephone conversations and drafting messages for customers. A strong command of grammar and vocabulary, especially in a foreign language, is essential for clear and logical communication. Key components of writing skills include academic writing, revising and editing, critical reading, and presenting data. The ability to present data accurately and in a verifiable manner is an integral aspect of professional communication. As technology evolves, virtual communication channels, such as social networking sites, blogs, texting and instant messaging, have become vital tools in the hospitality industry. Formal and well-crafted writing is necessary to avoid confusion and maintain guest satisfaction. A lack of adequate writing and reading skills can lead to significant misunderstandings and diminish the overall guest experience (Lolli, 2013b; Pankaew et al., 2021). In addition, the ability to tailor writing for diverse customer needs and adapt to various formats is a critical skill for hotel staff. Hotels can ensure higher levels of guest satisfaction and professionalism by employing formal and effective written communication.

H_1: *Written communication skills are the predictors of the satisfaction of hotel guests.*

Non-verbal communication skills scales

Non-verbal communication in the service industry includes kinetic, physical and non-verbal expressions, such as body movements, kinesiology, smiling, facial expressions, relaxed demeanour, open attitude, eye contact, nodding and other similar gestures (Sundaram & Webster, 2000). Non-verbal communication skills that are either consciously or unconsciously integrated into dialogue do convey social messages known as non-verbal cues. These cues are instrumental in building involvement, closeness, intimacy, and even dominance. Remarkably, they account for nearly 70% of all communication, thus, underscoring their significance. Non-verbal communication is as impactful as verbal communication and influences employee-customer interactions, while accounting for nearly half of the variability in interpersonal communication responses (Barnum & Wolniansky, 1989; Sundaram & Webster, 2000).

Staff must be mindful of various aspects, including tone of voice, speech speed, vocal intensity, proxemics (relative distance and stance during interactions), and physical appearance. Building intimacy through politeness and friendliness involves specific non-verbal actions, such as leaning forward, maintaining an open posture, frequent eye contact, mild humour and relaxed smiles. These behaviours shape the receiver's perception of the communicator's authority, conviction, politeness and warmth. For example, likeability, credibility and satisfaction are strongly associated with eye contact. Verbal and non-verbal indicators can effectively convey interpersonal warmth. An employee's smile or sustained eye contact can reassure hotel guests by conveying emotions like concern, kindness and compassion. Greetings accompanied by a firm handshake, nod or eye contact enhances customers' perception of honesty, trustworthiness, friendliness and courtesy. Moreover, the strategic use of touch in service delivery can make clients feel more approachable and empathetic. However, leaning backward, adopting a closed posture, or avoiding eye contact can be perceived as unfriendly and emotionally distant, which potentially leads to customer dissatisfaction. Behaviours such as finger-pointing, closed postures or sparse/intense eye contact can communicate carelessness, authority or superiority, which could alienate customers and harm

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their experience (Siddiq et al., 2016; Sundaram & Webster, 2000). This study explored various facets of non-verbal communication, including maintaining eye contact during interactions, using appropriate gestures, wearing professional attire, building trust and credibility, appearing sincere and trustworthy, demonstrating genuine understanding, and employing culturally appropriate communication skills.

H$_2$: Non-verbal communication skills are the predictors of hotel guests' satisfaction

Oral communication skills

Oral communication involves the ability to effectively articulate thoughts and is one of the most widely used and essential competencies. It includes skills such as presenting, active listening and utilizing body language, all of which are integral to effective communication (Maes et al., 1997). Oral communication is crucial for responsible citizenship and professional success. Misunderstandings with customers are likely to occur if there is a lack of strong oral communication skills. In the hospitality industry, effective oral communication is indispensable for handling telephone calls, managing check-ins and check-outs, greeting and welcoming guests, and providing clear explanation of information. It is also vital for negotiation, offering suggestions, presenting solutions and appropriately confirming information or inquiries (Dunbar et al., 2006; Pankaew et al., 2021). According to Sundaram and Webster (2000), verbal behaviours, such as polite greetings, significantly influence customers' perceptions of an employee's friendliness, thereby enhancing the perceived quality of service and overall tourist satisfaction. Inadequate vocabulary when explaining/correcting errors or negotiating can lead to ineffective communication. In order to meet the needs of tourists and ensure their satisfaction, hotel employees must adapt their speaking style to the audience and context, deliver clear and structured presentations and convey complex ideas in a coherent and precise manner through well-organized language.

H$_3$: Oral communication skills are the predictors of satisfaction of hotel guests.

Listening communication skills

Listening entails actively receiving, interpreting and responding to a communicated message. It involves not only hearing but also comprehending and processing the underlying meaning of the message, which is a critical mental task (Krizan et al., 2008). Effective listening is especially crucial in scenarios like telephone conversations, understanding customers' requests and addressing complaints, as these require strong listening skills, which is an essential component of interpersonal communication (Pankaew et al., 2021). Key listening skills include active participation in meetings, attentively hearing messages, focusing on the speaker, understanding and identifying key concepts, recalling information and critically evaluating both the communication and the speaker (Cuic Tankovic et al., 2023). Listening attentively helps employees to better understand customer needs, identify core issues and take appropriate action to resolve concerns and conflicts. This not only enhances customer satisfaction but also builds loyalty by demonstrating respect and empathy, ultimately contributing to the prosperity of the hotel. Furthermore, the ability to grasp, remember and accurately interpret messages can significantly boost productivity and strengthen teamwork. Empathetic listening helps build trust and collaboration, leading to a more cohesive and

effective workplace environment (Stay Express, 2024).

H₄: *listening communication skills are the predictors of hotel guests' satisfaction*

Digital communication skills

Digital literacy extends beyond basic proficiency in using software and devices, including a complex array of cognitive, social and emotional skills that are required to adapt to contemporary media (Eshet-Alkalai, 2004). Key competencies include accessing, evaluating and sharing digital information, creating digital content, maintaining security and privacy, and using technology for problem-solving (Siddiq et al., 2016). In the hospitality industry, digital tools such as mobile apps streamline travel planning and enhance customer experiences. Mainstream apps like Booking.com, Airbnb, and Expedia allow users to search, compare and book services conveniently. Platforms, like Google Maps, provide real-time information regarding tourist attractions, restaurants and transportation that aid informed decision-making. Mobile payment systems further ensure secure and seamless transactions (Neirotti et al., 2014).

The information, communication, content generation, safety and problem-solving parts of the self-assessment grid were created according to each specific criterion to help in building digital skills in Europe. Digital skills or digital literacy involve efficiently accessing digital information, exploring different digital content while conducting research, providing sources of digital information, assessing the appropriateness and authenticity of information, verifying the accuracy of information and one's own policies, displaying information, sharing information with others, using computer software to generate digital products, providing digital feedback about one's work, and understanding the consequences of making information freely available on the web. Digital skills include the ability to identify, find, access, store, organise and analyse digital information for specific purposes, interact and participate in communities and networks, produce creative expression and media output, maintain personal security and privacy and solve conceptual problems (Ferrari, 2014; Siddiq et al., 2016). Key data pertaining to hotel management include forecasting tourist arrivals, demand and occupancy rates, as well as the analysis of online reviews and its impact on hotel performance. Chatbots are capable of managing a large volume of simultaneous and personalized conversations, leverage sophisticated analytics to promptly interpret customer requirements and provide predictive responses. This streamlines interactions, saves staff time by automating repetitive tasks and promptly resolves customers' inquiries (Calvaresi et al., 2023; Melián-González et al., 2019). Staff should be well-versed in using smart digital applications to effectively adapt and cater for guests' preferences in order to enhance guests' satisfaction and overall hotel performance.

H₅: *Digital communication skills are the predictors of hotel guests' satisfaction*

Linguistic politeness strategies

Yule (1996) defined politeness as, "*the tactics used to demonstrate awareness of another person's face*", with "face" referring to "*a person's public self-image*". Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1987) described "face" as, "*the unhindered freedom to act as well as the gratification of having one's ideals approved*" (Sadeghoghli & Niroomand, 2016). Green (1996) defined politeness as, "*any conduct in which a person displays consideration for another person by attempting to make that person feel at ease or by*

making an evident effort to avoid making that person feel uneasy". Respecting the feelings and self-image of others during interactions is fundamental to politeness. When an individual's sentiments or public self-image are jeopardized, it is perceived as a "face-threatening act" (FTA). According to Brown and Levinson (2017), self-image comprises two components, namely a positive aspect or the desire to be approved and liked by others, as well as a negative aspect or the wish to maintain autonomy and freedom from imposition. Certain expressive acts can harm either the listener's positive or negative "face", or both. FTAs are communicative behaviours that threaten the "face" of the hearer, which speakers aim to avoid in order to maintain effective communication. Politeness strategies for avoiding FTAs emphasize three core principles, such as not imposing, providing options, and making the listener feel comfortable. These principles help to minimize social conflicts and build an environment of rapport. Linguistic politeness mitigates inconvenience and contributes to higher traveller satisfaction. Studies highlight that polite-mannered tour guides can avoid FTAs and enhance traveller experiences (Nudin et al., 2021; Supardi et al., 2019; Dewa, 2017). Politeness strategies are essential for strengthening social bonds by acknowledging the needs and interests of interlocutors. Hence, by showing attentiveness and respect, speakers can create an atmosphere of empathy and friendliness, which imposes positive communication dynamics.

Holtgraves (1997) explored the concept of politeness in conversational arguments and highlighted the importance of politeness strategies in mitigating conflicts and maintaining rapport. The study underscored the role of language in recognizing the "face wants" of interlocutors by addressing their needs, interests and desires. Individuals can build solidarity and shared understanding through the use of positive politeness strategies, thus, creating a positive conversational atmosphere. Similarly, Al-Azzawi (2011) examined compliments as a specific form of positive politeness. The study emphasized the power of compliments as communicative acts that express appreciation, admiration and respect. Individuals can strengthen interpersonal bonds and promote social harmony by integrating politeness strategies into the act of giving compliments. Miyamoto et al. (2017) investigated the application of positive politeness strategies in the human-agent interaction domain to enhance relationships between humans and life-like agents. The research highlighted how adopting positive politeness behaviours, such as expressing interest, offering compliments and using polite language, can improve user experiences. Life-like agents can build trust and rapport with human users by incorporating these strategies, ultimately facilitating more engaging and effective interactions.

Cultural differences play a critical role in shaping communication behaviours and politeness strategies. Goby (2007) described the multicultural dimension of communication as, "*a social space where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power*". Understanding these differences is vital for professional communication. For example, individualistic cultures, such as those in English-speaking countries, emphasize autonomy and self-disclosure. Conversely, collectivist cultures, like China, prioritize group orientation and communal harmony (Zhu et al., 2006). In Japan, where formal language and customer-centric service are deeply valued, FTAs can significantly lower tourists' satisfaction levels. Tour guides must adhere to Japanese norms of politeness, such as using appropriate

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honorifics, since casual or teenage-level politeness forms are often considered impolite in professional contexts (Nudin et al., 2021). Service providers can ensure effective communication and enhance customer satisfaction by understanding and respecting cultural variations.

H_6: *Linguistic politeness strategies are the predictors of hotel guests' satisfaction*

Satisfaction of tourists

According to Paksoy et al. (2017), factors that contribute to satisfaction include experiencing joy and happiness doing one's work while avoiding undesirable behaviours, such as boredom and conflict. However, dissatisfaction and conflicts are often unavoidable in the service sector due to varying customer expectations and differing perceptions of service. Some customers may seek recognition and intimacy, while others might prefer strictly professional, service-specific interactions. Reducing potential conflicts and stress by taking initiative in conversations, modulating tone of voice and demonstrating expertise can enhance guest satisfaction during service encounters. Mutual understanding between staff and guests positively influences customer satisfaction. In addition, the style of relationship plays a crucial role in guest contentment. For example, social distance can be established through impersonalisation, such as addressing customers with formal terms like "Sir", whereas using first names signifies closeness. Interactions with individuals of the opposite gender have also been found to yield more favourable communication outcomes (Nikolich & Sparks, 1995). The study also identified key indicators of guest satisfaction, including feeling pleased with the hotel, enjoying their stay, captivated by the hotel's scenic beauty, intention to revisit and recommending the hotel to others.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH METHODS

Yuka (2009) emphasised the importance of creating a positive learning environment and creating productive communication for attaining higher satisfaction by incorporating politeness techniques, such as expressing interest, offering compliments or using inclusive language. This study adopted quantitative methods to examine the impact of communication skills and linguistic politeness on hotel guests' satisfaction by focusing on the importance of applying digital skills in Batam Island, Indonesia.

Study framework

This study aimed to assess random conversations between hotel staff and tourists in a variety of hotels in Batam, Indonesia, in order to quantify the impact of politeness and effective communication on tourists' satisfaction. Cuic Tankovic et al. (2023) had provided the measures for written communication skills (WC), oral communication skills (OC), listening communication skills (LC), digital communication skills (DC), and non-verbal communication skills (NVC). The measures for satisfaction of tourists (ST) and linguistic politeness (LP) were self-developed measure. It is presumed that customer satisfaction is directly impacted by one's ability to communicate orally, in writing, digitally or non-verbally. In addition to language proficiency, Figure 1 illustrates how linguistic politeness can improve tourists' pleasure through communication.
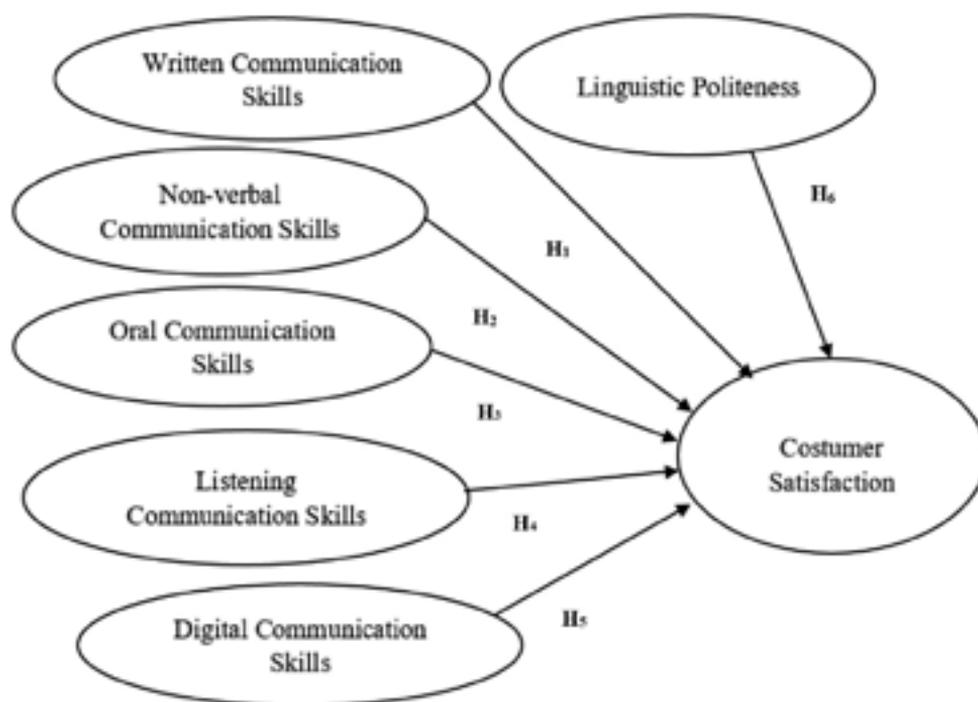
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Figure 1. Proposed model for measuring tourists' satisfaction

Sources: Developed by the authors.

The sample, data collection and ethical consideration

This study utilized online data collection methods. The primary instrument was a structured online questionnaire, distributed to travellers and groups (local and international) who had stayed in hotels on Batam Island, Indonesia through social media by certain hotel employees as well as by vacationers. 257 surveys were required to provide a confidence level of 95% and the real value should be within ±6% of the measured/surveyed value for an infinite population size, assuming a population proportion of 0.5. A total of 285 valid responses between July-October 2023 were collected using purposive sampling. Data analysis techniques included descriptive statistics, regression analysis, One Way ANOVA, independent t-test, and correlation. One Way ANOVA and independent t-test methods are used to find significant differences among demographic and other variables. The decision to use hierarchical multiple linear regression in this study was based on the need to examine the incremental effect of different types of communication skills and linguistic politeness on tourist satisfaction (ST). This method allows us to enter predictors in conceptually meaningful blocks, thus helping to understand how each category of variables contributes to explaining variation in ST.

The ethics committee at the University of Batam in Indonesia approved the study protocol, issuing decision no. 473/LPPM-UPB/VII/2023. This study complied with ethical standards concerning voluntary participation and anonymity. All the par-

ticipants gave their approval to be included in the study by answering an informed consent question that was included in the survey form. 57.9 % of them were female and the majority were between the 20-30 (62.5%) years old. The majority had high school education or an equivalent (55.5%) certificate and university degree (33.0%). 78.9 % (225) of the participants were from Indonesia and the rest (21.9%) were from Vietnam (3.5%), Singapore (3.2%), Myanmar (2.8%), India (2.1%), Malaysia (1.8%), Bhutan (1.4%), Kyrgyzstan (1.4%), Philippines (1,4%), Pakistan (0,7%), Kazakhstan (0,7%), Turkey (0.4%) etc. (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic profiles of the study sample (N = 285).

Variable		n	%	Variable		n	%
Age	15-20	68	23.9	**Education level**	Primary education	2	0.7
	20-30	178	62.5		High school or equivalent	158	55.5
	30-40	27	9.5		University	94	33.0
	40-50	10	3.5		Master degree	28	9,9
	50 +	2	0.7		PhD	1	0.4
	Total	285	100.0		Total	285	100.0
Gender	Female	165	57.9	**Having Children**	No	247	86.7
	Male	120	42.1		Yes	36	12.6
	Total	285	100.0		Total	285	100.0

Sources: Developed by the authors based on respondents' answers.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to present data and Pearson's coefficient (r) correlations, t-independent test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), and hierarchical multiple linear regression methods were used to evaluate data and test hypotheses by applying the SPSS.22 software. Skewness and kurtosis coefficients indicated sufficient symmetry parameters of normality by using skewness and kurtosis values < | 2| as acceptable (George & Mallery, 2010). The factors have values of skewness between -1.164 and -1.07 and kurtosis between 0.32 and 0.52 in our study. Multicollinearity was chececked by means of the correlation matrix of the independent variables that there were low correlations among factors less than 0.7. The Durbin Watson statistic always assume a value between 0 and 4 to check autocorrelation. A value of Durbin Watson = 1.84 in this study indicates that there is no autocorrelation. No heteroscedasticity was detected by checking regression of the standardized residuals, the regression of the standardized predicted values and P-P Plot graphs that they are normally distributed. Explanatory factor analysis (EFA) was used to identify underlying factors within a set of observed variables.

Measures

A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Totally disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = disagree and agree (neutral), 4 = agree, and 5 = Totally agree) was used to measure the effects of five communication skill dimensions related to hotel guests' satisfaction. These abilities include written, oral, listening, digital and non-verbal communication, which were adapted

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from Cuic Tankovic et al.(2023) in the literature. High reliability scores (Cronbach's Alpha values), such as WC (0.964), OC (0.959), LC (0.962), DC (0.965) and NVC (0.982), were found in this study. Factor loadings are shown in Table 3.

Satisfaction (ST), Linguistic Politeness (LP) and Communication skills measures were used in this study. Using a Likert scale, self-developed measures of satisfaction and linguistic politeness were created. First (item ST1) 89.618 % of variance while other items explained the rest of variance. Sphericity tests were developed to test the data's suitability for factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) method was used to determine the consistency of the data, or item/variable values. KMO is a criterion as opposed to a test statistic, unlike Bartlett. A value of .923 is considered a strong Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of sampling adequacy based on Field (2000) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square= 1894.538 and Sig.= 0.000) were found in this study. Two newly developed measures were analysed using factor analysing and sampling. The Principal Component Analysis and Verimax rotation methods of extraction explain 100% of the variation, and the ST group factor's coefficient value was 0.938 and clustered under one factor. The Cronbach's alpha reliability score was high (0.971) for the ST group. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for the LP group yielded an approximate Chi-Square of 860.568 and a Sig. of .000, while the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was .777 at the middle level. LP was under one group and factor coefficients were greater than 0.954. First item (LP1) explained 91.217 % of Variance and LP had a high Cronbach's alpha (0.952) reliability score.

RESULTS
Descriptive Statistics

60.4% of the participants earned a monthly salary of USD1,000-2,000, so the higher the salary, the more frequently they travelled. Their travel frequency was usually 1-2 times per year and about half of them could not travel every year. Social media is the most important platform used to find a hotel (44.2%, n=126), followed by friends' suggestions (15.8%, n=45). Another important way of finding a hotel was through the recommendation of satisfied guests. Cost was the most important factor when choosing a hotel (34.7%, n=99). Other important factors that played a role when choosing a hotel were bed/room specifications (25.3%, n=72) and cleanliness (23.9%, n=68) (see Table 2).

The factor coefficients and reliability values are satisfactory across all groups (see Table 3). The importance of written communication skills, oral communication skills, listening skills, digital communication skills, non-verbal communication skills and linguistic politeness was unanimously acknowledged by all participants. Mean values for all groups that influence satisfaction are so similar that it is not possible to determine which group holds greater significance. Two of the most critical criteria for enhanced satisfaction are the hotel's picturesque scenery and guests' enjoyable experiences during their stay. Conversely, inappropriate language and a lack of politeness can lead to dissatisfaction. Building trust, honesty and truthfulness are pivotal elements of effective non-verbal communication. No significant differences (p > 0.05) were observed for any factor across the variables based on t-tests and one-way ANOVA tests, including gender, age, salary, education level, parenthood, nationality (Indonesia vs. other countries) and travel frequency.

Table 2. Salary, frequency of travel, ways of finding a hotel and reasons for choosing a hotel

Variable		N	%	Variable		n	%
Salary	1. 000-2.000	172	60.4	Finding a Hotel	Agency	21	7.5
	2. 000-3.000	25	8.8		Friend Suggestions	45	15.8
	3.000-4.000	29	10.2		Google Search	81	28.5
	4.000-10.000	37	13.0		Social media	126	44.2
	Others	20	6.4		Others (Booking.com etc.)	6	2.1
	Total	285	100.0	Reason(s) for choosing a hotel	Pools	8	2.8
Travel Frequency	1-2	84	29.5		Bed /Room specifications	72	25.3
	3-4	26	9.2		Cleanness	68	23.9
	5 or more	12	4.2		Cost	99	34.7
	Total	122	42.9		Employees	11	3.9
					Meals	6	2.1

Sources: Developed by the authors based on respondents' answers.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics (N=285)

Items	Group	Factor Coefficients	Means	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Mean ± SD
Information and ideas presented in a comprehensible and logical sequence	WC1	0.957	3.57	1.17		
The capacity to modify writing styles for various readerships.	WC2	0.972	3.49	1.13	0.964	3.5263 ±1.10439
The capacity to modify writing styles for various formats.	WC3	0.968	3.50	1.12		
Ability to use a large vocabulary to clearly and concisely communicate complicated ideas.	OC1	0.967	3.52	1.14		
Ability to create clearly and methodically organised presentations on a variety of topics.	OC2	0.962	3.52	1.14	0.959	3.5263 ± 1.10190
Speaking in front of an audience and modifying your style of delivery accordingly.	OC3	0.955	3.52	1.13		
Focusing on the speaker while listening to messages.	LC1	0.974	3.52	1.15		
Recognizing messages and identifying key concepts.	LC2	0.966	3.55	1.16	0.962	3.5439 ±1.10807
Keeping messages in mind.	LC3	0.951	3.54	1.12		
Presenting digital information with a target audience and intent in mind.	DC1	0.944	3.57	1.13		
Exchanging digital data with other people.	DC2	0.948	3.58	1.13		
Giving digital feedback.	DC3	0.951	3.54	1.13	0.965	3.5728± 1.08455
Creating digital products (presentations, documents, images and diagrams) using computer software.	DC4	0.962	3.58	1.15		

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Maintaining eye contact with interlocutors.	NVC1	0.925	3.55	1.16	
Using appropriate gestures while talking.	NVC2	0.943	3.57	1.19	
Using appropriate professional attire.	NVC3	0.954	3.59	1.14	
Building trust and honesty.	NVC4	0.957	3.61	1.14	3.5985±
Being truthful and credible.	NVC5	0.967	3.61	1.15	0.982
Showing an honest understanding for other people.	NVC6	.958	3.62	1.16	1.09959
Demonstrating appropriate cultural communication skills.	NVC7	0.951	3.61	1.14	
It was a wise decision to visit that hotel	ST1	0.938	3.48	1.11511	
I had an enjoyable time at that hotel	ST2	0.952	3.58	1.10	
I am attracted by the hotel's beautiful scenery	ST3	0.954	3.60	1.16	0.971	3.5600±
I will visit the hotel again	ST4	0.951	3.55	1.10	1.06107
I will recommend the hotel to my friends	ST5	0.939	3.57	1.11	
The tourism personnel's linguistic and behavioural politeness makes me happy	LP1	0.954	3.55	1.09	
Positive face threatening acts improve my satisfaction	LP2	0.954	3.52	1.13	0.952	3.5485
Improper linguistic politeness expressions make me dissatisfied	LP3	0.958	3.56	1.10	±1.05987

Written Communication (WC), Oral communication (OC), Listening Communication (LC), Digital Communication (DC), Non-verbal Communication (NVC), Satisfaction (ST) and Linguistic Politeness (LP), SD=Standard Deviation, GM=Group mean

Sources: Developed by the authors based on respondents' answers.

Correlation among variables and scales based on Pearson correlation

As indicated in Table 4, there is no significant correlation between age, salary or travel frequency and any of the groups. However, a significant correlation exists between communication skills, satisfaction, and linguistic politeness. The strongest correlation is observed between written communication skills and oral communication skills (r = .961, $p < 0.01$), while satisfaction exhibits the highest correlation with politeness (r = 0.917, $p < 0.01$). Digital communication skills rank second in their correlation with satisfaction (r = 0.860, $p < 0.01$), which emphasises the critical role of modern communication skills in shaping tourist satisfaction. In addition, non-verbal communication skills show a strong correlation with digital communication skills (r = 0.959, $p < 0.01$).

Table 4. Pearson's correlation

Variable	Age	Salary	TF	WC	OC	LC	DC	NVC	ST	LP
Age	1	0.067	0.093	0.010	0.024	-0.013	0.002	-0.010	0.044	0.014
Salary	0.067	1	0.001	0.045	0.041	0.028	0.021	0.024	0.015	0.041
TF	0.093	0.001	1	-0.129	-0.120	-0.153	-0.133	-0.149	-0.102	-0.10
WC	0.010	0.045	-0.129	1	0.961**	0.92**	0.908**	0.902**	0.83**	0.84**
OC	0.024	0.041	-0.120	0.961**	1	0.93**	0.932**	0.921**	0.82**	0.82**
LC	-0.013	0.028	-0.153	0.922**	0.939**	1	0.951**	0.935**	0.81**	0.81**
DC	0.002	0.021	-0.133	0.908**	0.932**	0.95**	1	0.959**	0.86**	0.83**
NVC	-0.010	0.024	-0.149	0.902**	0.921**	0.93**	0.959**	1	0.84**	0.82**

| ST | 0.044 | 0.015 | -0.102 | 0.835** | 0.828** | 0.81** | 0.860** | 0.848** | 1 | 0.91** |
| LP | 0.014 | 0.041 | -0.104 | 0.845** | 0.827** | 0.81** | 0.837** | 0.828** | 0.91** | 1 |

Skills of Written Communication (WC), Oral Communication (OC), Listening Communication (LC), Digital Communication (DC), Non-verbal Communication (NVC), Satisfaction (ST), Linguistic Politeness (LP), Traveling Frequency(TF)
**. The significance level for the correlation is 0.01 (2-tailed).

Sources: Developed by the authors based on respondents' answers.

Regression analysis of tourists' satisfaction

The conceptual model outlined in Table 5 demonstrates a high R-square value of 0.872 (ANOVA: F = 636.672, p < 0.05), indicating that linguistic politeness, digital communication skills and listening skills are significant predictors of satisfaction. The model can be expressed as follows:

Tourist Satisfaction = 0.146 + 0.667*linguistic politeness + *0.*439*digital communication skills - 0.147*listening communication skills. Linguistic politeness and digital communication skills exhibit positive coefficients, signifying that their improvement can enhance tourist satisfaction. Notably, linguistic politeness emerges as the most influential factor in this model. On the contrary, listening communication skills have a negative coefficient, suggesting a complex relationship that warrants further investigation.

Table 5. Regression analysis of guests' satisfaction

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.146	0.082		1.780	0.076
Linguistic politeness strategies	0.667	0.039	0.667	16.988	0.000
Digital communication skills	0.439	0.072	0.448	6.063	0.000
Listening communication skills	-0.147	0.067	-0.153	-2.205	0.028

Dependent Variable: ST; Independent Variables: Written communication skills (WC), Oral communication skills (OC), Listening communication skills (LC), Digital communication skills (DC), Non-verbal communication skills (NVC), and Linguistic Politeness (LP)

Sources: Developed by the authors based on respondents' answers.

Digital communication skills (H_5) and linguistic politeness strategies (H_6) are confirmed as positive and significant factors influencing tourist satisfaction. Conversely, listening ability (H_3) has an adverse effect on tourists' satisfaction levels. Written (H_1), non-verbal (H_2) and oral (H_3) communication skills were found to be insignificant predictors of satisfaction, hence, leading to the rejection of hypotheses H_1, H_2, and H_3.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study provide insights into the relationship between front-line communication competencies and tourist satisfaction, some of which were expected and some of which were unexpected. While politeness, digital communication skills and listening skills were important predictors of tourist satisfaction, several core

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communication skills (especially written communication, oral communication and non-verbal communication) did not have a significant direct effect on satisfaction. The results, which were not significant, call into question widely held views about the importance of basic communication skills in ensuring guest satisfaction. Conventional service quality frameworks and hospitality training models frequently accentuate verbal and non-verbal proficiency as being of paramount importance to guest experience. In contradistinction, linguistic politeness — denoting respectful tone, empathy, and culturally sensitive communication — emerges as a more differentiating factor in how guests evaluate their service experience. This supports theories about communication between people, which say that the way people talk to each other, for example being polite, respectful and considerate, is often more important than the way they talk (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Rather than the format or channel of communication (e.g. verbal, non-verbal) influencing satisfaction, how valued and respected guests feel during interactions may have a stronger influence. Empathy and politeness often define these interactions.

Poor listening skills remains one of the most significant challenges as it restricts speakers from freely expressing their thoughts, which is a type of behaviour that often conveys inattention, impatience or poor judgment (Wolvin & Coakley, 1991). Examples of negative listening include changing the subject, asking irrelevant questions, offering unsolicited advice, multitasking (looking at a smartphone or computer), or physically disengaging from the conversation. According to Kluger et al. (2024), educational background, language proficiency and creativity are crucial qualities required for effective listening. The negative impact of listening communication skills on satisfaction can be attributed to the hotel employee's potential inability to fully understand the guest's needs or appropriately resolving their issues. Furthermore, employees may struggle to comprehend the language spoken by tourists or fail to listen attentively. In some cases, staff may prioritize selling products or guiding tourists for personal gain rather than addressing the latter's concerns, which can be both frustrating and dissatisfying for tourists.

Maes et al. (1997) had identified and highlighted the top three essential skills, namely oral communication, problem-solving and self-motivation. Listening, speaking (oral) and writing skills are deemed as the most critical communication skills in the tourism industry (Pankaew et al., 2021). This study corroborates earlier findings by revealing a high correlation between all communication skills. Most tourists prefer interacting through digital technologies and expect hotel employees to effectively utilize these skills. The politeness and fluency of tour guides have also been shown to significantly influence Japanese tourists' satisfaction (Nudin et al., 2021). Awareness of cultural differences is crucial, as what is considered polite in one culture may not apply universally. Polite communication demonstrates respect for others, benefitting both personal and professional relationships. Rules surrounding communication, rooted in historical contexts, have evolved alongside societal and technological advancements. In this study, satisfaction and linguistic politeness were found to have the strongest relationship. This highlights the vital role of linguistic politeness in hospitality communication. Batam Island, which is frequented by tourists from countries such as Japan, Singapore, and China, can benefit from hotel staff possessing cultural and linguistic knowledge to develop effective politeness strategies.

Hotel staff must stay attuned to emerging trends and continually enhance their digital skills, which are pivotal to the performance and marketing of the hospitality sector. In today's competitive environment, the tourism and hospitality industry must adopt technological innovations to enable real-time services and optimize interactions between hosts and guests (Buhalis et al., 2024). Modern digital tools eliminate the need for guests to rely on phone calls or text messages for their information needs. Information, such as the hotel's operating hours, restaurant recommendations and airline information, are now readily accessible via in-room electronic devices (Huang & Rust, 2021). Digitalization of the tourism sector has significantly improved user engagement and experience, thus enabling hotel bookings, airline ticket bookings, local attraction recommendations and services for disabled customers through mobile applications (Ukpabi et al., 2019). The quality of existing services, and by extension, user satisfaction, can be further enhanced with Chatbots (Calvaresi et al., 2023). The goal is to seamlessly elevate the overall experience while preserving the personal warmth integral to hospitality. Kazandzhieva and Filipova (2019) found that when consumers viewed videos featuring hotel service robots, their intention to use such services increased compared to other groups (Buhalis et al., 2024; Galati et al., 2021).

Effective communication is crucial for successful management practices in the hospitality sector. Strong managerial communication skills enhance employee job satisfaction and commitment, which allow them to focus fully on their roles. Consistent training can improve these skills (Paksoy et al., 2017). Bank tellers who maintained eye contact with customers reported higher satisfaction levels with the services they provided (Ketrow & Perkins, 1986). Furthermore, intercultural characteristics also influence communication strategies. For example, hotel staff in power-oriented cultures, like China and India, should use distinctive communication methods, whereas egalitarian strategies are more effective in cultures with lower power distance, such as New Zealand, where everyone is treated as having the same status (Zhu et al. , 2006). Hotel staff should be trained in effective eye contact, body language and the use of English. Proficiency in English language, Japanese or Chinese is essential for ensuring guests have a satisfying stay. Staff should also understand cultural differences of main guests and adapt their behaviour to meet the expectations of tourists from diverse backgrounds. Hence, by learning what tourists from different countries appreciate, staff can provide a more personalized and culturally sensitive experience. Conflict resolution and problem-solving skills are equally vital. Staff should be equipped to handle discussions and conflicts in a professional manner, thus helping to create positive outcomes. A friendly smile in the morning and polite communication can significantly enhance guests' perceptions, making them feel valued and confident in their choice of accommodation.

Limitations of the study and implications for future research

This study's strength lies in its comprehensive and multidimensional approach for measuring communication skills and politeness strategies. Unlike previous studies with a narrow focus, this study evaluated communication skills across a broad spectrum of attributes, while offering valuable insight for tourism managers. These findings can help managers better assess job applicants and assist higher education institutions in upgrading curricula to include digital technologies, verbal communication and po-

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liteness strategies.

These results highlight the need for hospitality managers and trainers to shift their training priorities. Greater emphasis should be placed on contextual sensitivity, politeness strategies and emotional intelligence in staff-customer interactions, even though foundational communication skills remain important. Also, the growing use of digital communication platforms in the tourism industry might lessen the impact of written and non-verbal communication on perception. For instance, guests communicating via email or app-based messaging may be more focused on tone and response time than grammar or body language. This suggests that the quality of communication and the tone used between people have more of an impact than the medium or style used.

However, there are some limitations in this study, which have implications for future research. The study sample consisted of national and international tourists who visited Batam Island, hence, separate samples for each type of tourist would provide a more accurate finding. Besides tourists, respondents should also include people working in the tourism industry. This study employed the purposive sampling method; hence, a larger sample size would comfortably provide more accurate results and findings. Considering that Indonesia is a multi-cultural and multi-racial country, the study should not solely focus on Batam island but also consider other more representative study locations. Tourists from different countries with different cultures should be considered by applying smart technologies to understand the role of AI-based digital technologies and politeness strategies in tourist satisfaction. In addition, the impact of new marketing strategies on tourist satisfaction and hotel performance embedded with smart technologies should be analysed and explored. Management's effect on communications skills should be explored since factors such as autonomy and hierarchy can influence the development and practice of these skills. There is a need for developing a politeness strategy measure that involves all communication methods. A new improved scale based on the measures adopted in this study should be developed by applying explanatory and confirmatory factor analysis to measure the definite effects of politeness. The mixed methods approach should be considered as it allows participants to express and demonstrate their real communication skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Digital communication skills and linguistic politeness strategies are confirmed as positive and significant factors influencing tourist satisfaction. Conversely, listening ability has an adverse effect on tourists' satisfaction levels. While written, non-verbal and oral communication skills were found to be insignificant predictors of satisfaction. However, all factors have high correlations with each other. The effective use of internet technology, comfortable amenities (beds, swimming pool etc.) and reasonable pricing significantly enhances a hotel's appeal. In addition, improved written communication skills and linguistic politeness positively influence tourist satisfaction. Hotel employees across Batam can leverage digital marketing strategies (AI, social media, and search engines like Google etc.) to attract more guests.

This study reveals that while basic communication skills are assumed to be essential in hospitality settings, they may not directly enhance tourist satisfaction unless accompanied by politeness, empathy, and relational competence. These findings urge

a reconceptualization of communication training in tourism — one that values how messages are delivered, not just what or through which channel. Satisfied customers, in turn, are more likely to recommend the hotel to others, thus, amplifying its reputation. This study highlights the importance of politeness and communication training to enhance staff performance, which paves the way for further empirical research in this area. Interestingly, the satisfaction of guests staying in Batam's hotels showed a negative correlation with the perceived quality of staff's listening skills. This indicates a pressing need for improvement in this area. Hotel staff should acquire better proficiency in English , Japanese or Chinese to facilitate effective communication and meet the diverse expectations of guests.

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