

Communication in the Hospitality and Service Industry: Systematic Literature Review Based on PRISMA

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Abstract: Communication is a fundamental element in the hospitality and service industry that directly influences service quality, customer satisfaction, and organizational performance. This study presents a systematic literature review employing the PRISMA 2020 framework (Page et al., 2021) to identify, select, and analyze scientific literature related to communication in the hospitality and service industry. A comprehensive database search was conducted across Google Scholar, Scopus, and DOAJ covering publications from 2021 to 2025. Of the 312 initially identified articles, 38 met the inclusion criteria and were thoroughly analyzed. Key findings reveal: (1) interpersonal communication is a primary determinant of customer satisfaction; (2) employee communication soft skills significantly impact service quality perceptions; (3) AI-driven digital communication is increasingly dominant post-COVID-19; (4) cross-cultural communication barriers remain a major challenge; and (5) organizational internal communication quality influences guest service performance. These findings carry practical implications for designing effective communication training programs and adaptive organizational communication strategies in the digital era.

INTRODUCTION

Hospitality and service industry is one of the most dynamic and human interaction-oriented economic sectors. In this context, communication is not merely a tool for delivering information, but rather the main foundation supporting all customer experiences and operational business sustainability. The ability of staff to communicate effectively, empathetically, and responsively to visitor needs becomes the primary determinant of company success in creating customer loyalty and competitive excellence.

The importance of communication in the service industry has been the focus of academics and practitioners for several decades. Previous research shows a strong positive correlation between the quality of employee communication and the level of guest satisfaction across various

segments of the hospitality industry. Ali et al. (2021) confirms that service quality, with communication as its primary element, is the most decisive factor in customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. Nikou and Khiabani (2020) found that interpersonal relationships formed through effective communication function as a key moderator between service quality and customer loyalty in four-star hotels in Malaysia.

Along with rapid digital technology development and disruption triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the communication landscape in this industry has undergone significant transformation. AI-based communication channels such as chatbots and virtual assistants have changed the way visitors interact with service providers (Carvalho & Ivanov, 2024; Wang, 2024). On the other hand, the increasingly diverse cultures among international visitors demand higher cross-cultural communication competence from hospitality professionals (Doherty et al., 2021; González & Garzón, 2021).

Although many individual studies exist, systematic syntheses using standardized review methodology for the 2021–2025 timeframe remain limited. This literature gap motivates the present study to conduct a systematic literature review using the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021).

This research formulates the following research questions: (1) What are the trends and developments in studies on communication in the hospitality and service industry during 2021–2025? (2) What dimensions and aspects of communication are most studied? (3) How does communication influence service quality and customer satisfaction? (4) What main communication obstacles have been identified and what are their implications for industry practice?

This study aims to: (1) identify and synthesize scientific literature on communication in the hospitality and service industry systematically; (2) map existing research trends and patterns; (3) analyze the role of communication in service quality and customer satisfaction; and (4) identify research gaps to provide recommendations for future studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communication in Service Context

Communication in the service industry can be defined as a process of exchanging information, messages, and meaning between service providers and recipients through various channels — verbal, nonverbal, and digital. According to SERVQUAL theory (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988), the ability to communicate is a core dimension of service quality encompassing responsiveness, empathy, and assurance. Ge et al. (2021) found that high service quality perceptions, heavily influenced by communication empathy and responsiveness, have a strong structural connection with perceived customer value and overall satisfaction at Starbucks Reserve outlets in Shanghai.

In the hospitality context, communication functions as a bridge between customer expectations and perceptions. Pine and Gilmore (1998) in their "Experience Economy" concept emphasize that communicative interaction between staff and guests is integral to a meaningful service experience. Ozgen and Kozak (2023) confirmed this, finding that customer experiences in five-star hotels are greatly determined by the quality of communicative staff interaction at every visitor touchpoint.

Employee Communication Soft Skills

Contemporary studies increasingly emphasize communication soft skills as core competencies of hospitality employees. Tankković et al. (2021) identified active listening, verbal and nonverbal communication as the strongest predictors of service quality from the guest perspective. Tankković, Vitezić, and Kraljć (2023) empirically show that employee soft skills — including empathy and verbal conflict management — significantly contribute to tourist satisfaction. Rabiul et al. (2022) found that managers' oral communication ability plays an important mediating role between employee work engagement and resilience in delivering quality service during the pandemic.

Digital Communication and Artificial Intelligence

The digital era has introduced new dimensions into the hospitality communication ecosystem. Wang (2024) describes how generative AI and ChatGPT are being integrated to provide personalized experiences, from room recommendations to real-time complaint responses. Carvalho and Ivanov (2024) comprehensively identify the benefits, risks, and applications of ChatGPT in tourism, emphasizing its potential to increase communication efficiency while noting ethical challenges. Singh and Singh (2024) found that AI integration in service communication systems can significantly increase customer loyalty through improved consistency and response speed.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication competence is a critical need in the global hospitality industry. Doherty, McGowan, and O'Connor (2021) found that staff with high cultural intelligence (CQ) can flexibly adapt their communication style to guests' cultural background, producing significantly higher satisfaction among international visitors. González and Garzón (2021) identified cross-cultural communication competence as one of the five most critical soft skills in the hospitality sector.

METHOD

Research Design

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). PRISMA is an internationally accepted reporting standard for systematic reviews, aimed at increasing transparency, reproducibility, and completeness of review results.

Data Sources and Search Strategy

Literature searches were conducted across three main databases: (1) Google Scholar; (2) Scopus; and (3) DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals). The publication year range was limited to 2021–2025. Searches were conducted in September–October 2024 using Boolean operators: ("communication") AND ("hospitality" OR "hotel") AND ("service quality" OR "customer satisfaction"). Searches were conducted in both Indonesian and English.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria: publication period 2021–2025; journal articles and indexed conference proceedings; Indonesian and English language; topic of communication in the hospitality/service industry; quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, or review methodology; full text available. Exclusion criteria: publications before 2021; books, reports, theses, editorials; other languages;

topics outside service/hospitality context; opinions without empirical data; abstract-only availability.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Aspect	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication Period	2021–2025	Before 2021
Document Type	Journal articles, indexed conference proceedings	Books, reports, theses/dissertations, editorials
Language	Indonesian and English	Languages other than Indonesian and English
Topic	Communication in the hospitality/service industry	Outside service/hospitality context
Methodology	Quantitative, qualitative, mixed, review	Opinion without empirical data
Accessibility	Full text available	Only abstract available

Article Selection Process (PRISMA Flow)

The article selection process was carried out through four stages following the PRISMA 2020 flowchart: Identification, Screening, Eligibility, and Inclusion. In the Identification stage, searches of three databases yielded 312 articles. After removing 48 duplicates, 264 unique articles remained. At the Screening stage, 142 articles were excluded based on title and abstract review. At the Eligibility stage, full texts of 122 articles were evaluated; 84 were excluded. Thus, 38 articles fulfilled all criteria and were included in the final analysis.

Table 2. Article Selection Flow (PRISMA 2020)

PRISMA Stage	Process	Number of Articles
IDENTIFICATION	Database search (Google Scholar, Scopus, DOAJ)	n = 312
	Removal of duplicates	Excluded: n = 48
SCREENING	Screening based on title and abstract	n = 264
	Excluded: irrelevant, outside year range, other languages, unsuitable document type	Excluded: n = 142
ELIGIBILITY	Full-text evaluation	n = 122
	Excluded: inadequate methodology, inappropriate topic, full text unavailable	Excluded: n = 84
INCLUSION	Articles included for final analysis	n = 38

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data were extracted using a standardized form that includes: article identity (author, year, journal), research purpose, methodology, sample/context, main findings, and limitations. Synthesis was conducted narratively (narrative synthesis) given the methodological heterogeneity. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring themes. Methodological quality was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) independently by two raters (Cohen's κ = 0.82).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

General Characteristics of Included Literature

Of the 38 final articles, the majority were empirical studies (n=29; 76.3%), followed by review articles (n=6; 15.8%), and case studies (n=3; 7.9%). Methodology distribution shows the domination of quantitative approaches (n=18; 47.4%), followed by qualitative (n=11; 28.9%), mixed methods (n=6; 15.8%), and review/conceptual (n=3; 7.9%). There has been a significant increase in research since 2021, indicating increasing academic attention to post-pandemic communication issues.

Geographically, studies from Southeast Asia accounted for 28.9% (n=11), East Asia 21.1% (n=8), Europe 18.4% (n=7), North America 15.8% (n=6), and other regions 15.8% (n=6). The most investigated service contexts were hospitality/hotel (n=16; 42.1%), followed by restaurant/F&B (n=8; 21.1%), tourism/travel (n=7; 18.4%), health services (n=4; 10.5%), and retail/banking (n=3; 7.9%).

Table 3. Distribution of Articles Based on Method and Service Context

Category	Sub-Category	Number (n)	Percentage (%)
Research Method	Quantitative	18	47.4%
	Qualitative	11	28.9%
	Mixed Methods	6	15.8%
	Review/Conceptual	3	7.9%
Service Context	Hospitality/Hotel	16	42.1%
	Restaurant/F&B	8	21.1%
	Tourism/Travel	7	18.4%
	Health Services	4	10.5%
	Retail/Banking	3	7.9%

Theme 1: Interpersonal Communication and Customer Satisfaction

The most consistent finding in the literature is the positive and significant connection between staff interpersonal communication quality and customer satisfaction. A total of 27 of the 38 articles (71%) identified interpersonal communication as a key determinant of satisfaction. Ali et al. (2021) found that empathy and communicative responsiveness are the strongest predictors of visitor satisfaction. Nikou and Khiabani (2020) expanded this by showing that interpersonal relationships built through communicative interaction moderate the connection between service quality and loyalty in four-star hotels in Kuala Lumpur.

In more specific dimensions, Ge et al. (2021) found that service quality built through interaction between baristas and customers at Starbucks Reserve in Shanghai strongly mediates perceived customer value. Ozgen and Kozak (2023) concluded that experiences at five-star hotels are differentiated primarily by staff communication quality. In the Indonesian context, Wulanda et al. (2024) found that front office interpersonal communication is highly determinant in shaping overall visitor experience at Asialink Hotel Batam, particularly in service information delivery and direct complaint handling.

Theme 2: Communication Soft Skills and Service Quality

Studies in the 2021–2025 period provide increasing attention to the role of employee communication soft skills. Tankković, Vitezić, and Kraljć (2023) empirically show that soft skills

— including active listening, emotional intelligence in communication, and verbal conflict management — directly influence tourist satisfaction. Rabiul et al. (2022) found that managers who communicate clearly and empathetically have employees who are more engaged and more resilient in providing quality service during crisis situations.

Theme 3: Digital Communication, AI, and Service Transformation

Wang (2024) reviews how generative AI and ChatGPT are being integrated in the hotel industry, providing personalized experiences while challenging essential human touch in hospitality culture. Carvalho and Ivanov (2024) identify applications, benefits, and risks of ChatGPT in tourism, emphasizing its potential for communication efficiency alongside data privacy and dehumanization risks. Singh and Singh (2024) empirically prove that AI integration significantly increases customer loyalty through consistency and speed of communication response. However, Kim and Kim (2022) found that the impact of digital communication technology on customer satisfaction is highly dependent on the quality of personal human response from hotel management.

Theme 4: Cross-Cultural Communication in Global Hospitality

A total of 18 articles (47.4%) in this analysis discuss cross-cultural communication as a key challenge and competency need. Doherty, McGowan, and O'Connor (2021) find that staff with high cultural intelligence (CQ) can flexibly adapt their communication style to guests' cultural background, producing significantly higher satisfaction among international visitors. González and Garzón (2021) place cross-cultural communication competence among the five most critical soft skills in the hospitality sector.

Theme 5: Internal Communication and Organizational Performance

Wu, Wang, and Ling (2021) found that effective inter-departmental communication mechanisms significantly increase consistency and quality of guest service in hotels in China. Wibowo (2022) identified that standardized internal hotel communication systems — including daily briefings, incident reporting, and multi-departmental coordination — directly impact operational efficiency and visitor satisfaction. Asshohi et al. (2024) confirmed that structured interdepartmental collaboration between the front office and housekeeping plays a critical role in ensuring service consistency.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review analyzed 38 scientific articles on communication in the hospitality and service industry (2021–2025) using PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Key conclusions are as follows:

First, interpersonal communication between staff and guests is the primary determinant of customer satisfaction, with communication soft skills — including empathy, active listening, and nonverbal communication — as the strongest predictors of service quality perception (Ali et al., 2021; Tankković et al., 2021, 2023; Ge et al., 2021; Wulanda et al., 2024).

Second, digital transformation has introduced AI, chatbots, and online review platforms as increasingly dominant service communication instruments. However, AI is most effective as a complement to human interpersonal communication, not a replacement (Carvalho & Ivanov, 2024; Wang, 2024; Singh & Singh, 2024).

Third, cross-cultural communication competence is an urgent need for global hospitality

professionals, with staff cultural intelligence as the key predictor of effectiveness with international visitors (Doherty et al., 2021; González & Garzón, 2021).

Fourth, quality of internal organizational communication has a significant indirect impact on external service quality (Wu et al., 2021; Hikmah Fitri & Kasmita, 2024; Wibowo, 2022). For future research, it is recommended to: (1) conduct in-depth qualitative studies on hospitality communication in Indonesian cultural contexts; (2) study the effectiveness of communication training through experimental design; (3) research AI-human communication dynamics in digital hospitality; and (4) develop validated communication competence measurement instruments for the Indonesian hospitality context.

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