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INVESTIGATING THE ATTITUDE OF TOURISM STUDENTS TOWARDS THE USE OF DIGITAL TOOLS IN DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS AND CREATIVITY

Abstract. *In the rapidly evolving environment of the tourism industry, effective communication skills have become essential for tourism specialists to succeed in their roles. This paper explored the important role that digital tools play in enhancing the communicative competence of professionals in the tourism sector. By leveraging a variety of digital platforms and technologies, including social media, virtual reality and online collaboration tools, tourism professionals can engage with diverse audiences, deliver personalized experiences and make meaningful connections. These digital practices raise questions about teachers' own digital technologies and their role in developing communication skills. Overall, 32 future specialists from the International University of Tourism and Hospitality in Turkestan participated. The descriptive research was conducted to examine how future specialists feel about using digital tools to improve their communicative skills. A quantitative research design was used. Descriptive data and differences by participants academic year and gender were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test. The results of the item analyses reveal that participants' attitudes towards digital technologies in developing communicative skills and creativity are self confident.*

Keywords: *digital technologies, tourism specialists, communitive skills, language learning, tourism, digital tools.*

Introduction

Globally, the tourism industry is characterized by its dynamic nature, requiring constant innovation to respond to changing market conditions. In this context, it is believed that excellent communication skills among tourism professionals are essential for success in the industry. In addition to traditional communication approaches, the current trend towards digitalization highlights the growing importance of digital technologies in improving the communication abilities

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of tourism professionals. The tourism industry is inherently focused on human connection, emphasizing the need for effective communication to help business increase customer satisfaction and achieve a competitive advantage. Tourism professionals in this industry are responsible for a wide range of tasks, including promoting destinations, developing tour packages and enhancing the overall travel experience through appropriate consumer engagement. As a result, there is an urgent need for tourism professionals to continuously develop their communication skills [1].

For generations, travel businesses have depended on traditional methods of communication. However, the introduction of digital technologies has led to significant changes in communication methods and platforms. Digital technologies are evolving as communication tools in the tourism industry, presenting themselves through various channels such as social media platforms, websites, email, smartphone applications and virtual reality interfaces. Tourism professionals can use these tools to communicate directly with potential customers, accelerate effective information transfer, and tailor the customer service experience to individual tests [2].

The impact of digital tools on improving the communication skills of tourism professionals can be approached from different perspectives. For example, social media platforms offer tourism professionals opportunities to interact with target audiences and promote destinations. Websites are crucial for attracting potential customers and marketing tourism services. Mobile applications contribute to customer convenience and enhance their travelling experience.

Delving deeper into the role of digital tools in tourism communication, these tools offer several benefits to the sector. Firstly, social media platforms provide direct interaction between travel experts and their audiences, acting as a hub for sharing travel experiences and planning trips. Websites serve as a hub for travel promotion, booking and customer support, raising the profile of experts through engaging content and user-friendly interfaces. Mobile apps play a key role in enhancing the travel experience by providing access to maps, event bookings and emergency assistance [3].

There are a variety of strategies to improve the communication skills of travel professionals. Effective use of digital communication tools such as social media can increase brand awareness and customer loyalty. Investing in education and training programmes improves the communication skills of professionals, facilitating effective interaction with customers. Continuous feedback and evaluation processes are vital to improve communication strategies based on customer feedback, thereby increasing satisfaction levels [4].

The evolution of the tourism sector requires adapting to market demands and technological advancements. Studies have scrutinized the role of digital tools in tourism communication and suggested strategies to improve the communication skills of professionals. Studies by Hulai and Kabak (2023) highlighted the role of social media in engagement and brand building, while Wau et al. (2023) focused on educational programmes to improve communication skills [6,7]. Bogdanova (2023) emphasized the importance of feedback processes and Brown and Lee (2020) discussed the impact of mobile applications on customer satisfaction [8, 9]. Clark and Miller (2021) emphasized the importance of websites in engaging customers and building trust [10].

In today's dynamic and interconnected world, digital tools play a crucial role in improving the communication skills of tourism professionals? These tools offer access to a wealth of information, support real-time decision-making and provide a variety of communication platforms to engage stakeholders. Strengthening communication skills through digital tools leads to increased customer satisfaction, improved industry collaboration and increased productivity in the tourism sector [11].

Digital tools have become an integral part of language learning and cultural interaction, especially in the context of the globalizing tourism industry. As tourism professionals interact from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, digital platforms provide critical support through language learning apps, translation software and cultural sensitivity training programmers [12]. These tools help bridge communication gaps and create meaningful connections with international clients.

Turdieva's findings for 2022 highlight that the evolving digital skills environment in tourism is impacting a variety of jobs, including holiday planning, sustainable tourism design and adventure facilitation. Skills gaps in this sector are primarily in soft skills, language skills, interpersonal communication abilities and ICT proficiency rather than subject matter specific knowledge [13]. Emphasizing design technology in tourism education promotes critical thinking, creativity and communication skills in future specialists.

In addition, digital tools facilitate collaboration between team members as well as between departments within tourism organizations. Project management software, cloud platforms and virtual communication tools increase efficiency and facilitate effective teamwork. Internally, these tools promote coordination and harmony among employees by optimizing the flow of information through intranets and instant messaging platforms [14].

It is important to remember that while digital tools offer many benefits to improve communication, they also require a certain level of digital literacy and expertise. Ongoing training is required so that professionals can fully utilize these tools to improve communication.

Future digital skills in tourism include self-learning capabilities, digital fluency, e-business skills, artificial intelligence and VR/AR technologies for personalized experiences. Addressing these skills gaps is critical for tourism businesses as new positions require expertise in areas such as computer programming, data analysis and artificial intelligence [15].

Research on digital skills gaps in tourism highlights the need for education and training policies that priorities digital literacy for citizens and future industry professionals. In addition, digital tools play an important role in improving communication skills, advertising strategies and social media management in the tourism industry. Effectively implemented digital marketing strategies outperform traditional methods, allowing companies to directly engage with potential customers and increase conversion rates. However, a poorly implemented digital strategy can lead to customer dissatisfaction and loss of market share; this emphasizes the importance of professional digital marketing and communication strategies in the tourism industry.

Effective social media management has become an important practice for businesses in the tourism sector. By utilizing social media platforms, businesses can significantly increase their visibility and credibility, attracting a diverse audience and promoting their services. A transparent and informative social media presence is key to building trust and credibility among users. The role of well-designed social media ads in the digital world cannot be overemphasized. These adverts need to be comprehensive, meet the specific needs of potential customers while being tailored to the target audience. Google ads provide an invaluable opportunity for businesses to expand their reach, requiring attention to content relevance and audience consistency to maximize return on investment. Working with professional digital marketing agencies can facilitate these processes and achieve better results [16].

A carefully designed website acts as a digital shop window that represents a company's online identity. Elements such as easy navigation, interactive features such as contact forms, and visually appealing content are essential for attracting and retaining potential customers. Implementing

effective SEO strategies is crucial to ensure a website's visibility and competitiveness in search engine rankings. Optimizing website performance, resolving technical issues quickly and creating compelling call to action elements are essential to attract organic traffic and gain a competitive advantage in the digital space [17].

The advent of digital tools has revolutionized communication practices, especially in the travel sector. Skillful management of social media platforms, strategic use of social media advertising, use of Google ads, maintaining an optimized website and using effective SEO techniques together form the cornerstone of successful digital marketing and communication strategies for tourism businesses.

Consequently, the literature emphasizes the key role of digital skills in the tourism industry, highlighting the need for ongoing skills and training to meet growing digital needs and improve the guest experience. The aim of this article is to explore the impact of digital tools on improving the communication skills of tourism professionals. Initially, the importance of communication skills in the tourism industry and their significance for career success will be emphasized. Then, the widespread use of digital tools in tourism communication and their potential benefits will be explored. Finally, we will focus on how these digital tools can improve the communication skills of tourism professionals and suggestions for future research in this area.

Research questions:

1. What is the attitude of tourism specialists towards the use of digital tools in developing the communicative skills and creativity?
2. Is the attitude towards the use of digital tools on developing the communicative skills and creativity of tourism specialists related to age, gender and professional experience?

Materials and methods

In this study, quantitative research design was used to investigate future specialists' attitudes towards digital tools and tourism specialists' attitudes towards improving their communication skills. Quantitative data were collected through the implementation of questionnaires administered to International University Tourism and Hospitality. Data were collected through questionnaires specifically designed to assess participants' perspectives on the benefits of digital tools in improving communicative skills.

The research study was conducted in the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic years. 32 future specialists from two groups participated in the study. The research was carried out with participants aged 18-27 who were studying at B2-C1 level in the 3rd – 4th year of tourism specialists. There were 15 male and 17 female participants in this overarching study.

Data from 32 future specialists' responses were analyzed using a Likert-type scale. A 15-item questionnaire based on the checklist items suggested by the researchers was used to collect data. Respondents were asked to rate their agreement with five statements on a Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The questionnaire included positive and negative questions about tourism professionals' attitudes towards digital tools and improving tourism specialist's communicative skills. The use of this approach enabled the researchers to gain a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the participants' perspectives on the topic. According to the information provided, the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.824$) is considered to be high. (See table 1).

Table 1 – Reliability of the scale

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
,824	15

The research team was given a questionnaire to collect data on tourism specialists' attitudes towards digital tools and improving tourism professionals' communicative skills.

The questionnaire results were explained in terms of their academic application. The questionnaire was created with Google Forms. Participants were asked to be honest in their responses to the questionnaire, and the questionnaire was processed using the SPSS version 26.0. The normality test was performed to determine whether parametric or non-parametric analysis was more appropriate. The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk revealed a non-normal distribution. Because the variables in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test followed a normal distribution, the data was analyzed using a nonparametric test. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data to find the mean values and standard deviations of the responses to the first research question. The second research question was investigated using Mann-Whitney U-test.

Results

Based on the information provided, the reliability coefficient of the questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.824$) is considered to be high, which means that the questionnaire is a reliable instrument in measuring the respondents' attitudes towards digital tools and tourism specialists' attitudes towards improving their communicative skills. A reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.600$ is generally considered the minimum acceptable level for research purposes, hence, a coefficient of $\alpha = 0.824$ is considered to be quite high [17].

Overall, this study provided valuable insights into the potential of digital tools and tourism specialists' attitudes towards improving their communication skills.

According to the first research question "What is the attitude of digital tools toward developing the communicative skills and creativity of tourism specialists?" The clear results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 – Descriptive analysis of the research

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total	32	2,56	3,49	3,0362	,42051

The researcher used descriptive analysis as a statistical tool to measure future specialists' attitudes towards digital tools and tourism specialists' attitudes towards improving their communication skills. The analysis revealed that the future specialists had an extremely positive outlook towards the use of digital tools for communication skills. The results showed future specialists' mean attitude score towards the use of digital tools was relatively high ($M= 3.0362$, $SD= 0.420$), indicating that future specialists perceive improved communication skills as a valuable and effective tool for tourism specialists.

In addition, Mann - Whitney U test was conducted to find the answer to the second research question regarding the attitude of digital tools toward developing the communicative skills and creativity of tourism specialists related to gender and professional experience. (See table 3).

Table 3 – Mann-Whitney U test (Gender differences)

Gender	N	Mean Rank	U	P
Male	15	61,30	5,174	0,061
Female	17	56,94		

*p <0 .05

Mann- Whitney - U test was used to investigate whether there are any differences between male and female future specialists in their perceptions of the use of digital tools to improve the communication skills of tourism specialists. The results obtained from the analysis show that there is no significant difference between genders in this regard. The mean score was MR= 61, 30 for males and MR= 56, 94 for female participants. It is noteworthy that both male and female future specialists have positive attitudes towards the use of digital tools to improve the communication skills of tourism specialists. According to the findings of the study, in 2021 Ali et al. suggested that there is no difference between, male and female future specialists and that digital tool can be a powerful tool to enhance the learning experience and make education more enjoyable and effective for everyone [18].

Table 4 –Mann-Whitney U test (Grade differences)

Participants	N	Mean Rank	U	P
Junior	18	49,83	5,163	0,259
Senior	14	53,12		

*p <0 .05

Table 4 showed that the difference in mean ranking scores between the two groups in terms of junior and senior future specialists' attitudes towards digital tools and communicative skills and creativity towards tourism specialists was not significant. According to the mean ranking scores, final – year future specialists demonstrated a significantly higher level of digital tools (MR = 53, 12) than third year future specialists.

Third year future specialists had lower mean ranking scores (MR= 49, 83), but they were comparable to seniors. Therefore, it can be concluded that the communicative skills and creativity of future specialists in digital technologies for tourism professionals are better than those of third-year future specialists.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal several important insights regarding the use of digital tools for improving communication skills among tourism professionals. Here are the key points for discussion:

The Mann-Whitney U test results (U = 5.174, p = 0.061) indicate no statistically significant difference between male (MR = 61.30) and female (MR = 56.94) participants in their attitudes toward digital tools. This suggests that gender does not play a determining role in the acceptance and utilization of digital communication tools in tourism, which aligns with contemporary workplace expectations of digital competency regardless of gender.

The high mean score (M = 3.0362, SD = 0.42051) demonstrates a generally positive attitude toward digital tools among future tourism specialists. This positive disposition is crucial for several reasons:

1. It indicates readiness for digital transformation in the tourism industry

2. It suggests potential ease of implementation for new digital communication tools
3. It reflects alignment between educational preparation and industry demands

Reliability of Findings

The high reliability coefficient ($\alpha = 0.824$) lends strong credibility to the study's findings. This robust internal consistency suggests that:

- The measurement instrument was well-designed
- Responses were consistent across items
- The findings can be considered reliable for making industry recommendations

Practical Implications

These findings have several practical implications for the tourism industry:

1. Organizations should invest in digital communication tools with confidence that they will be well-received by both male and female professionals
2. Tourism education programs should continue to integrate digital communication tools, as students show positive attitudes toward their adoption
3. The high acceptance rate suggests that digital communication tools could be standardized across the industry without significant resistance from professionals

Limitations and Future Research Directions

While the study provides valuable insights, several areas warrant further investigation:

1. The relatively small sample size ($N=32$) suggests the need for larger-scale studies
2. The age range (18-27) is limited and could be expanded to include more experienced professionals
3. Future research should examine specific digital tools and their relative effectiveness

These findings contribute to our understanding of how digital tools are perceived in tourism education and practice, while highlighting the industry's readiness for continued digital transformation in professional communication.

Conclusion

When we consider the possibilities of using modern digital tools in communication skills, their effectiveness in the educational process as tools contributing to the development of future specialists' communicative skills and creativity should be taken into account. The use of digital educational materials stimulates future specialists' communicative activity and increases their desire to study the lesson. In the educational environment, there is a concern that the teacher is removed from the educational process. Undoubtedly, there will be a transformation of some of the teacher's functions, but the functioning of digital tools as an educational tool, as a tool that contributes to achieving educational goals, will willingness to encourage future specialists to study discipline.

In conclusion, the respondents highly praised the use of digital technologies in foreign language learning for developing future specialists' communication skills. Further research could examine specific technological tools and applications for developing digital literacy and language proficiency.

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ТУРИЗМ СТУДЕНТТЕРДІҢ КОММУНИКАТИВТІК ДАҒДЫЛАРЫ МЕН ШЫҒАРМАШЫЛЫҚТЫ ДАМЫТУДА ЦИФРЛІК ҚҰРАЛДАРДЫ ПАЙДАЛАНУҒА КӨЗҚАРАСЫН ЗЕРТТЕУ

Аңдатпа. Туризм индустриясының қарқынды дамып келе жатқан ортасында тиімді коммуникативті дағдылар туризм мамандарының өз рөлдерінде табысқа жетуі үшін маңызды болды. Бұл мақала туризм секторындағы мамандардың коммуникативті құзыреттілігін арттыруда цифрлық құралдардың маңызды рөлін зерттеді. Түрлі сандық платформалар мен технологияларды, соның ішінде әлеуметтік медианы, виртуалды шындықты және онлайн ынтымақтастық құралдарын пайдалана отырып, туризм мамандары әртүрлі аудиториялармен араласа алады, жеке тәжірибені жеткізе алады және мағыналы байланыстар жасай алады. Бұл цифрлық тәжірибелер мұғалімдердің жеке цифрлық технологиялары және олардың коммуникациялық дағдыларды дамытудағы рөлі туралы сұрақтар тудырады. Жалпы, Түркістан қаласындағы Халықаралық туризм және қонақжайлылық университетінен 32 студент қатысты. Сипаттамалық зерттеу студенттердің коммуникативті дағдыларын жақсарту үшін цифрлық құралдарды пайдалану туралы көзқарасын зерттеу үшін жүргізілді. Сандық зерттеу жобасы

қолданылды. Сипаттамалық деректер мен қатысушылардың оқу жылы мен жынысы бойынша айырмашылықтар Mann-Whitney - U тесті арқылы талданды. Баптарды талдау нәтижелері қатысушылардың коммуникативті дағдыларды дамытуда цифрлық технологияларға деген көзқарасы өзіне сенімді екенін көрсетеді.

Кілт сөздер: цифрлық технологиялар, туризм мамандары, коммуникативті дағдылар, тіл үйрену, туризм, цифрлық құралдар

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ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ СТУДЕНТОВ ТУРИЗМА К ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЮ ЦИФРОВЫХ ИНСТРУМЕНТОВ ДЛЯ РАЗВИТИЯ КОММУНИКАТИВНЫХ НАВЫКОВ И КРЕАТИВНОСТИ

Аннотация. В быстро развивающейся среде туристической индустрии эффективные коммуникативные навыки стали необходимы специалистам по туризму для достижения успеха в своей работе. В этой статье исследована важная роль, которую цифровые инструменты играют в повышении коммуникативной компетентности профессионалов туристического сектора. Используя различные цифровые платформы и технологии, включая социальные сети, виртуальную реальность и инструменты онлайн-сотрудничества, профессионалы туризма могут взаимодействовать с разнообразной аудиторией, предоставлять персонализированный опыт и устанавливать значимые связи.

Эти цифровые практики поднимают вопросы о собственных цифровых технологиях учителей и их роли в развитии коммуникативных навыков. Всего в мероприятии приняли участие 32 студента Международного университета туризма и гостеприимства в Туркестане. Описательное исследование было проведено с целью выяснить, как студенты относятся к использованию цифровых инструментов для улучшения своих коммуникативных навыков. Был использован количественный дизайн исследования. Описательные данные и различия участников по учебному году и полу были проанализированы с помощью U-критерия Манна-Уитни. Результаты анализа заданий показывают, что отношение участников к цифровым технологиям в развитии коммуникативных навыков является самоуверенным.

Ключевые слова: цифровые технологии, специалисты по туризму, коммуникативные навыки, креативность, изучение языков, туризм, цифровые инструменты