

SIGNIFICANCE OF COMMUNICATION FOR FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES – PERCEPTION OF HOSPITALITY GRADUATES

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Abstract:

The concept of communication is to share ideas, views and information with other individuals around you. When the information or views are shared clearly, it is called as Effective Communication. Effective communication is the most essential aspect of any business and workplace. Communication skills are even more important in the hospitality sector as we are directly interacting with the guests. Also, there is lot of coordination required between the operational departments. Hospitality industry offers products as well as services to the customers. The main objective is to provide services to customers to achieve guest satisfaction and repeat business. And communication is an effective tool to achieve the same. The study is focused on the significance of Communication skills required for the frontline employees who need to interact with the guests at different points and for various reasons. The responses were collected from the students pursuing hospitality management courses in institutes from Pune city. The students were pursuing degree courses of three years or four years and some students were pursuing other courses like diploma or certificate courses in hospitality management. A structured questionnaire was formed and floated through Google Forms through the population. Total 81 responses were collected. Analysis of received responses was done with the help of graphs and charts. The results reveal that the hospitality graduates are well aware of the importance of all aspects of communication and the significance of the same in hospitality industry.

Keywords: Communication, Hospitality Industry, Frontline Employees

1. Introduction:

The concept of communication is to share ideas, views and information with other individuals around you. When the information or views are shared clearly, it is called as Effective Communication. On the contrary, there are misunderstandings, anger and irritation due to poor communication. Effective communication is the most essential aspect of any business and workplace. Communication skills are even more important in the hospitality sector as we are directly interacting with the guests. Also, there is lot of coordination required between the operational departments. Hospitality industry offers products as well as services to the customers. It is a part of service industry. The main objective is to provide services to customers to achieve guest satisfaction and repeat business. In such scenario, it is essential that the basic skill of the services i.e. communication skill holds immense importance. As mentioned earlier, one needs to interact and coordinate with team members, other departments and the guests while carrying out various procedures.

2. Background of Study:

The current era is of digital communication. But the basic communication can be broadly segregated as verbal communication and non-verbal communication. All types of communication are equally important for the organization and the employees working there. The hospitality organizations take efforts to enhance or polish the communication skills of the employees. As they are aware of the fact that effective communication is the basis of smooth operations. The organizations use following methods to improve communication skills amongst their employees;

- Training: the front-line employees need to be trained to communicate with the team members, staff from other departments and most importantly with the guests. It helps in handling difficult situations like handling complaints, solving guest queries regarding menu, bills etc and helping the guests with other routine procedures in different areas of the hotel. It is quite essential that the employees must be motivated to communicate in English, especially at workplace and with the guests. Also, it is important that the management must plan the training sessions at regular intervals to imbibe the importance & use of effective communication amongst employees.
- Listening skills: The process of communication becomes more effective when it is a two-way process. As it is expected that the employees should be able to communicate in an appropriate way, it is also important that the management should give a listening ear to the views, ideas and suggestions. Same is applicable when there is an interaction between the employees and the guests. Listening skills are very significant, especially when the employees are handling critical situations like irate guests, billing issues, negotiations with guests, delayed services or maintenance issues with the guest rooms etc. it is therefore essential to take regular feedback from guests in the form of Feedback Forms at the time of checkout and from the employees at regular intervals either in written form or by direct interaction with management representatives.

- **Mirror Technique:** The finest and appropriate way to handle critical situations with guests is to use the Mirror Technique. It is nothing but to reflect in the same way while communicating with the guests. If one can see that the guest is facing some issues and wants it to be addressed immediately. It is then necessary to act equally quickly and try and provide appropriate solution for the same. Also, at the same the Listening Skills take a front seat. It is very essential that in such conversations, the employees must be listening to the guest and understand the exact problem. It is then much easier to deal with the situation and the irate guest. Also, a quick action and timely solution will help in keeping the situation under control.

3. Significance of Effective Communication in Hospitality Industry:

As mentioned earlier, hospitality industry is a part of service sector. It is quite significant that the front-line employees must understand the importance of communication, especially with the guests. The industry offers products long with services. Effective communication can provide the guest satisfaction along with services rendered.

The art of communication can provide many benefits to the employees, guests as well as the organization. The same are enlisted below;

- **Creating First Impression:** It is an accepted fact that a first impression is a lasting impression. It is much more important in the hospitality industry as Hospitality means “A Gesture of Welcome”. The best way to exhibit hospitality is a warm smile and effective communication. It is an easiest way to create a lasting impact on the memories of the guests.
- **Achieving Customer Satisfaction:** Customer satisfaction can be achieved when the services are rendered with consistency and the standard of services. Also, communication helps in handling critical situations which also leaves a good impression about the organization in the mind of the guests. The same results in repeat business and word of mouth publicity and promotion of the organization.
- **Collaboration and Team Building:** Effective communication prepares a base for sharing ideas and views in a clear manner. The same avoids any kind of confusion and further complications in the dialogue and coordination between employees and guests and even the team members. It creates a platform for better coordination and collaboration with each other in the organization and a healthier work environment which results in optimum output in-terms of performance. The same reflects in providing services to guests and achieving guest satisfaction, being the main objective of any hospitality organization.
- **Positive Attitude & Confidence:** It is quite natural that when the employees can have proper communication without any confusion, it builds a positive work environment and results in optimum output from the employees. Also, the ability to communicate in an effective manner, making others understand your thoughts, ideas and views gives a feeling of confidence to an individual. And it is a quality of a good leader.
- **Career Development:** When one achieves the art of communicating in an effective way, it is evident that it is easy to collaborate and have smooth flow of work resulting in

improved performance at all levels of management. Also, it is very crucial while handling the critical situations and the guests. But with proper and clear way of communication, all these situations can be handled properly and appropriate solutions can be provided to pacify the situation. This is an innate attribute of the manager. It becomes possible with the art of effective communication. Such employees have bright future and can progress in their career.

- **Essential Pre-requisite for Employment:** Having the ability to communicate fluently with others in professional manner and language is quite essential. The hospitality industry majorly uses English as a language for interactions and to carry out daily procedures. The employers would seek the ability of fluent communication, especially in English amongst the candidates (Hospitality Graduates) at the time of interview. The graduates having good communication skills can exhibit the skills they have acquired and the possibility of getting an employment increases considerably. The employers insist on having this attribute amongst the employees, especially those who are going to dealing with the guests i.e. the front-line workers.

Importance of Communication While Interacting with Guests: interaction of employees with guests is one of the most important aspects specifically with the service sector. Hospitality industry is a part of service sector and it stands different from the other industries in terms of services. The hospitality industry offers a combination of products as well as services.

Communication plays a vital role in delivering the services to the guests. The employees have to interact with the guests at the time of offering different products to the guests in various areas of the hotel. If the same is not done with proper communication, the product may not satisfy the guest. It is always believed that even a simple smile and a friendly gesture can make up small faults on the part of the employees and on the contrary, even a finest product can-not give the satisfaction if the same is not clubbed with hospitality and communication or interaction with the guests.

If one has excellent communication skills, that will aid in improving the service experience for the guests. It shows that you are paying complete attention to the needs of the guests and you are well organized to fulfill the same. Timely services always win the hearts of the guests and leaves a lasting impression on the memories of the guests. The outcome of the same is guest satisfaction, repeat business, word of mouth publicity and increased profits for the organization.

The process of communication starts from the very first point of contact i.e. the reservation. The customer may call the organization for enquiry or booking of guest room, restaurant table or a banquet hall. If the employee who is attending that call is fluent with English communication, has courteous tone and has complete product knowledge, the conversation is smooth and the customer gets the needed information and the assistance. The next point of interaction is generally with the Front Desk staff when the guest arrives in the hotel. The most important aspect for the Front Desk staff is the way a guest is received and welcomed in the hotel. While completing the registration procedure, the staff needs to communicate with the guest to understand the needs and requirements about accommodation.

During the stay of the guest in the organization, various POS (Point Of Sale) are used by the guests to avail various products, services and facilities offered by the hotel. At every POS, in

various operational departments and public areas, the staff members need to interact with the guests while explaining the products and facilities offered. And also, to handle guest enquiries and complaints.

It is apparent that the front-line employees need to interact with guests and the team members for better coordination and offering flawless services to the guests. The importance of Effective Communication can be very well understood for having smooth operations.

4. Literature Review:

Rajendra Mahajan (2015) in the article “The Key Role of Communication Skills in the Life of Professionals” has spoken about the importance of communication in every professional life. Every Youngster wants to progress in their work life for which only skills are not important even the communication is very important for a bright future and endure in this competitive world. Multinational Companies always expect that all their employees should have good communication skills along with technical skills.

The paper discusses that body language is equally important to communicate in the professional world. All the departments should communicate effectively for better businesses and also to promote their business. The articles also discuss about the different ways to make communication effective at work place. The universities and colleges should add communication skills and concentrate in developing the skill for better career.

Lahap, Ja. O’Mahony, Bb. Dalrymple, Jc (2015) in the research “The Importance of Communication in Improving Service Delivery and Service Quality in the Malaysian Hotel Industry” the author has emphasized that the tourism industry contributes hugely to the economy of the country, many countries also depend largely on tourism for their development. In Malaysia travelers from all over the world are seen as there are many connecting destinations and flights from Malaysia. It was observed that in 2013 the tourism industry contributed 20 billion the economy. As there is a heavy flow of tourist in Malaysia it is important the good service is given to the tourist for which maintaining the quality of service is the main issue.

To improve the service quality delivered by the hotels a multi-dimensional construct was used and it was observed that it was useful in improving the quality of service. The researchers used Stratified Sampling Technique to come to the outcome as to how Internal Marketing Orientation can help in enhancing service quality.

Dr Ali A Alalmal, Dr. Mohd Aarif (2019) in the case study “Importance of Effective Business Communication for Promoting and Developing Hospitality Industry in Saudi Arabia” the authors have emphasized that language, skill, words and phrases have an important impact on communication. If the communication is not proper the message will be misunderstood by the receiver. It is important to deal with things sensibly and realistically to make communication better.

As we have to deal with lot of other companies and business organizations to trade it is important that our communication is more effective and practical. The research method used is

qualitative and the questionnaires were circulated online to collect the data. The research concluded that it is not only important to know new things but it is equally important to use it in our daily lives. Practical learning is very important and effective and it should be included in the practical curriculum right from the beginning.

J. Cambra-Fierroa, I. Melero-Polo b, R. Vázquez-Carrasco in the article “The role of frontline employees in customer engagement” the authors have explained that transactional analysis has played a great role in maintaining the relationship with the customers as if they use the products again and again and also buy the products again it shows the long lasting relationship of the customer with the organization. But lately it has been realized that reference from others relating to the products and organization and mouth to mouth publicity is important for maintaining relations with the customers.

This research has realized the importance of frontline workers in maintain relations with the customers as they are the face of the organization and also interact and make sure that the customers are satisfied. This article is dealing with what has gone wrong previously with the frontline workers in dealing with the customers and what steps have to be taken for an effective customer satisfaction. It is also important that the customer complaints are handled carefully to have a long lasting relation with them. The questionnaire was circulated within all the mobile users.

Sibanyoni, J.J, Tabit, F.T. & Annan, C.Y. (2018) “An exploration of the internal communication practices in hotels of Gauteng province, South Africa” the research was taken to understand the implementation of communication in hotels. A survey that was observational was conducted and questionnaire was circulated to circulate the data. The results showed that the 72% of the employees agreed that they behave as the top management wants them to behave.

Around 56% employees get a feedback from their managers as to how they are performing. Usually the communication that follows is Vertical Communication. The employees also showed there concern that the top management do not take their suggestions into consideration and do not appreciate their work. It was also concluded that salary, race and their experience in the industry counts for the internal communication. The internal communication is Inter departmental and between different employees from different departments.

Yuchao Shao Dr. Seonghee Cho (2017)in the research paper “The Effect Of Front Desk Employees’ Characteristic’s On The First Impression Of Customers And Customers’ Satisfaction” the articles share the views that the Front office Employees are the face of the organization and the customer experience will enhance during check in as how the Front office associate with deal with them. The study focuses on how the customers experience with the front office employees gives an image with regards to the impression of the organization. The study was conducted and linear regression and factor analysis were the methods used to come to a conclusion. It was concluded that the ability to do something successfully creates the first impression and if the first impression is not as per the expectations then it effects the organizations relation with the customers. It was also studied check in experience of the customers help in creating positive or negative relation as per there experience.

MirjanaRadovicMarkovic, AidinSalamzadeh (2018) in the study “The Importance of Communication in Business Management” it has been observed communication helps in exchanging ideas and giving knowledge which ultimately gives the expected results in the organization. Communication is required to understand the needs that will help in reaching company goals. The top management should be able to give the instruction properly and effective communication helps in building relations and also effects the reputation of the organization. The study tries to show that hoe good communication can help in effective functioning of the organization and how it is important for the survival on the company. The research also showed that good interaction is a never ending process and it has to be improved all the time.

Chef Anurag Singh Thakur (2016) in the Blog “Communication skills in hotel Industry” have written about the need for good communication skills as managers spend a lot of their time in communicating with the customer orally or through body language. In the organization everyone communicates whether it is interdepartmental, with the customers or with the suppliers. Communication in hospitality Industry plays an important role. It is important for the people in the organization to transmit the message in the most appropriate manner for effective communication. The Front line workers play a very important role in customer engagement and the Company as they are the ones who are communicating with the customer’s maximum number of times. It is important that the employees know about the organization so as to give proper information to the customers as it is very crucial for customer satisfaction. Good Communication with the customers can be beneficial for the hotels as it can give them repeated business and the connect will make sure that the customers keep coming back to you. It is important that the customers tell us about what they like and what they are disappointed about so as improve the services and to understand what they need.

Thomas Baker, Adam Trapp, Tracy Meyer (2014) in the paper “The role of brand communications on front line service employee beliefs, behaviors, and performance” the authors have emphasized on the fact that the front line employees give a different impression to the customers regarding the organizations brand due to which the top management has a very little control on how their brand will be delivered. The model was prepared to understand how brand knowledge helps in enhancing the performance of the employees. The paper also discusses how the front office employees should be able to promote the brand in the right manner by knowing about the services properly. The data was collected from different means as employees, managers and job performance data. The data was also collected from the people who were already working and then the analysis was done. After the responses it was concluded that the information will be given to the customers in the right manner if the brand values are known well internally.

AnaCuic Tankovic, Jelena Kapeš & DraganBenazić (2022) in the research “Measuring the importance of communication Skills in Tourism” it has been sighted that tourism professional need to have a better and pleasant communication skills so that they are able to give better and great service to the tourist. The study has been done to understand the new techniques that should be used to improve the customer experience during their tourism. Communication skills can be non –verbal, orally, written and can be through digital means. The responses received

through questionnaire has given results as to what other techniques can be used to enhance the tourist experience and how it can be implemented in the tourism industry. The scale technique was used to understand with different communication attributes to rate the factors that will enhance the tourist experience.

Shivam Arora (2014) in the article “Benefits of Effective Communication in the Hotel Industry” the most important attribute for the staff and hotel managers is to communicate efficiently with the guest and the staff that they are working with. It is important to give training to the staff with regards to the communication skills that are required to give a good impression to the customers as it cannot be achieved without practice. It has also been noticed that staff who are not well verse with English find it difficult to communicate with the customers as well as employees of other departments. The author has suggested different ways of training your staff so as to improve their communication skills. The article also discusses the advantages of good communication as it develops confidence in the employees and better interpersonal skills. It also helps in developing positive and better relations with the customers.

Ra’edMasa’deh, Omar Alananzeh, Omar Jawabreh, RashedAlhalabi, Hassan Syam and Faisal Keswan (2019) “The association among employees’ communication skills, image formation and tourist behavior: perceptions of hospitality management students in Jordan “the authors in the study have decided to understand the communication skills on the basis of language, non-verbal communication and the appearance of the employees. It helps in understanding that how well the employees can communicate on the same lines. The primary data was collected and the results showed that the way we communicate with our employees makes an image about the hotel and creates a word of mouth which ultimately shows in the tourist footfall. The communication skills are directly related to the tourist behavior and the way they feel the communication is being done by the employees.

Savannah Samoszuk(2021) in the article “Communication Skills in the Hospitality Industry” the author has explained that communication is a two way process and is required for trade of ideas, knowledge and information. So it is important that we communicate in the right manner with the guest who are staying with us to give the guest exclusive service and to have a long lasting relationship with the customers. Customers communicate with the frontline employees if they want any service or they want to make any reservations. It is important for them to be pleasant and courteous towards the guest as it is the most critical part of hospitality. The guest will always be creating the image of the hotel or restaurant as the way the employees will communicate with them, so according to the article communication is crucial and should be handled in the right manner for greater guest satisfaction.

George Dickson (2022) in the blog “Why Frontline Worker Communication Is More Important (and easier) Than Ever” the blogger in the article has emphasized that the frontline employees are always the heartbeat of any organization. They are aware about the services and the products the organization is offering. Frontline workers or employees are the people who have the most important information so it is very important for them to share it in a right manner. The only way the frontline workers can communicate the information is through their managers. The blog also mentions that how employee’s co-ordinate and work with each other plays an important role as those are the qualities that all frontline employees should acquire. Communication with your colleagues is a very important function as it helps in smooth

functioning of the organization. It is also important that frontline workers are benefited so that they give their best to the organization and the communication is smooth.

Oluwafemi Ayo in the paper “The Important of Communication Skills in Hospitality Industry in the author has discussed that communication is a two way process and it is important that we greet the customers with a smile and also welcome them with a warm greeting as that can help in changing the mood of the customer. It is also important that we keep our patience when we dealing with customers who are demanding as it will not be right to lose our patience when dealing with the guest. It is very important that the customers are well trained and have good communication skills as it is important for them to communicate efficiently with the guest.

5. Research Methodology:

The research is an effort to understand the importance of Communication skills for the employees in hospitality sector. It is one of the important skills needed for employees in the hospitality industry as it offers services along with products. The study is focused on the significance of Communication skills required for the frontline employees who need to interact with the guests at different points and for various reasons.

The responses were collected from the students pursuing hospitality management courses in institutes from Pune city. The students were pursuing degree courses of three years or four years and some students were pursuing other courses like diploma or certificate courses.

A structured questionnaire was formed and floated through Google Forms through the population.

The first section includes demographic information of the respondents. The second section includes the statements related to various forms of communication that takes place during interaction with the guests. The respondents had to rate the importance of various aspects of communication as per their perception.

Total 81 responses were collected. Analysis of received responses was done with the help of graphs and charts.

The same is presented in the further section of data analysis.

6. Data Analysis:

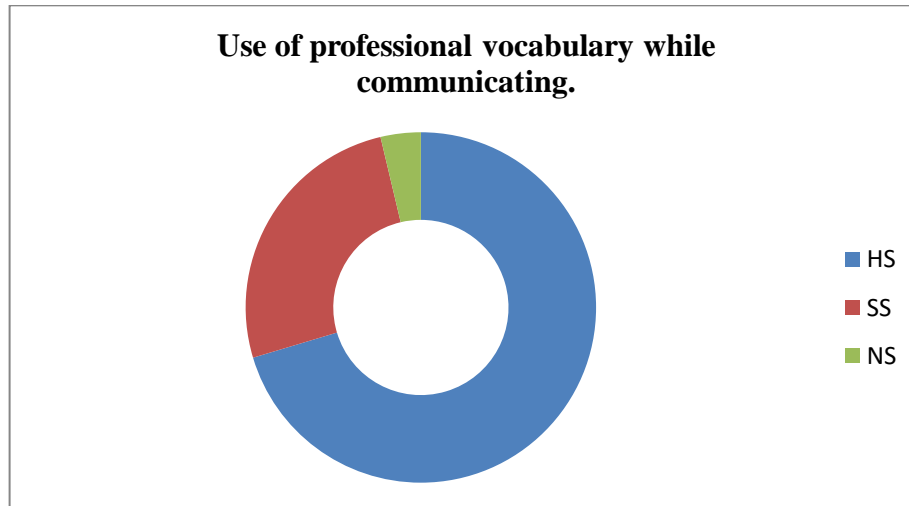
The responses were collected from the students pursuing hospitality management courses from various hospitality management institutes in Pune city. The data is analysed and presented in the form of graphs and elaborated below.

The hospitality management graduates who responded to the questionnaire are studying in various institutes/ colleges like Bharati Vidyapeeth IHMCT, AISSMS' CHMCT and Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth.

The respondents were asked about their opinion on various aspects of Communication skills and its significance for the frontline employees in hospitality sector as they have to communicate and interact with guests and customers at various points in the hotel. It is even more important when one needs to communicate with the customers while handling critical situations like complaint handling. The respondents were required to rate the communication skills as per the importance of each aspect perceived by them. The analysis if the same is as follows.

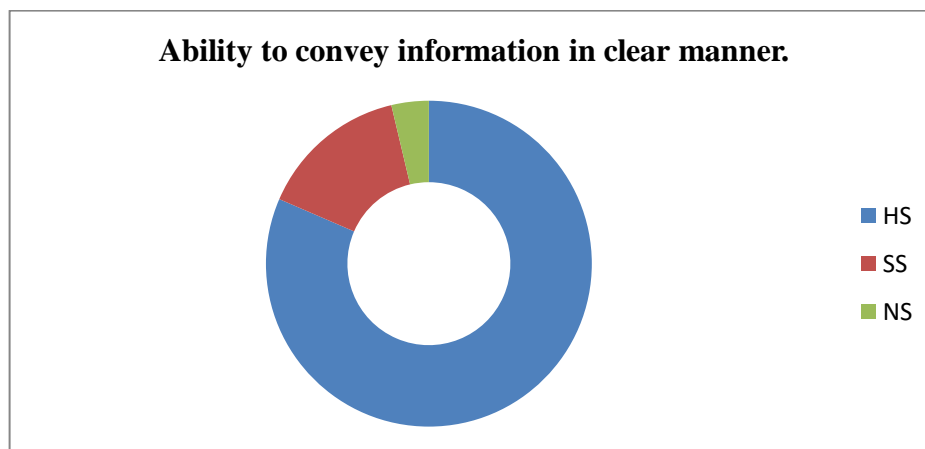
The aspects of communication included written, verbal and non-verbal communication. The statements and questions were formed related to all facets of communication. The findings from data received are discussed below.

Figure 1

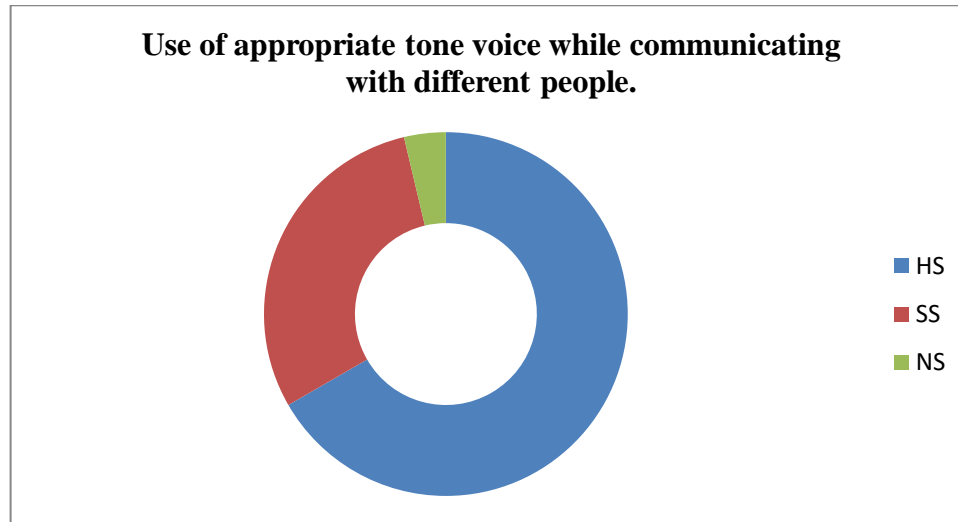


- Majority respondents, 70% state that use of professional vocabulary and technical phrases and terms is very essential at workplace. It is necessary while communicating with guests as well as team members in the organizations. Some respondents feel that using professional terms is somewhat significant at workplace.

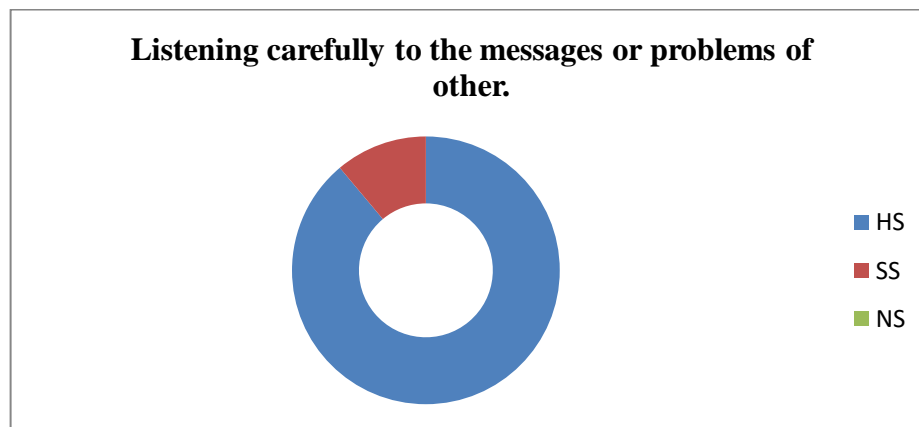
Figure 2



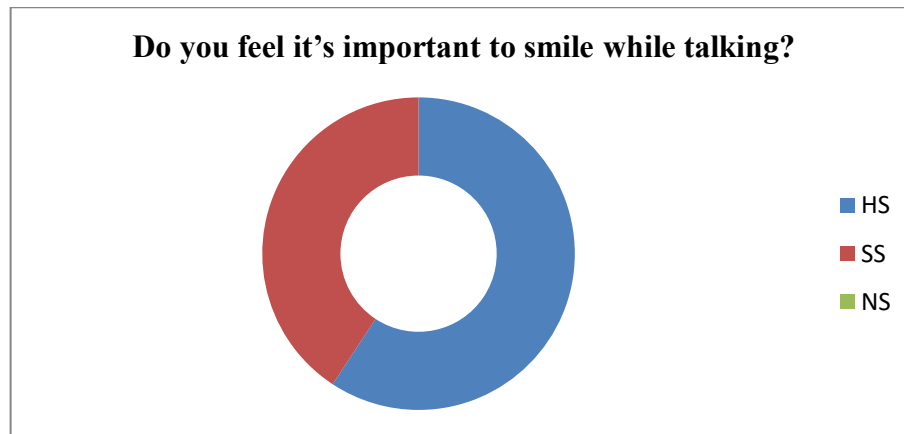
- The very basic idea of communication is that one should be able to communicate ideas, views and information in clear manner with others. Most of the respondents, 82% state that it is very essential that one should be able to communicate the information with guests and colleagues in a clear way. This helps in avoiding any kind of confusion and chaos. Very few respondents feel that it is somewhat important to be able to communicate in a clear manner.

Figure 3

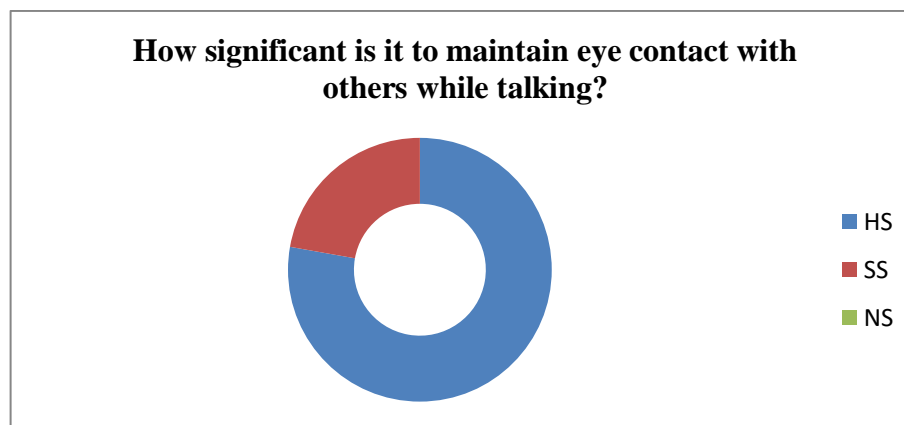
- Along with clarity in communication, the voice, pitch and tone while talking with others holds importance. Almost two third i.e. 67% respondents feel that it is very much essential to have an appropriate tone and voice while communicating with others. It is essential that you maintain the professional tone and voice at workplace.

Figure 4

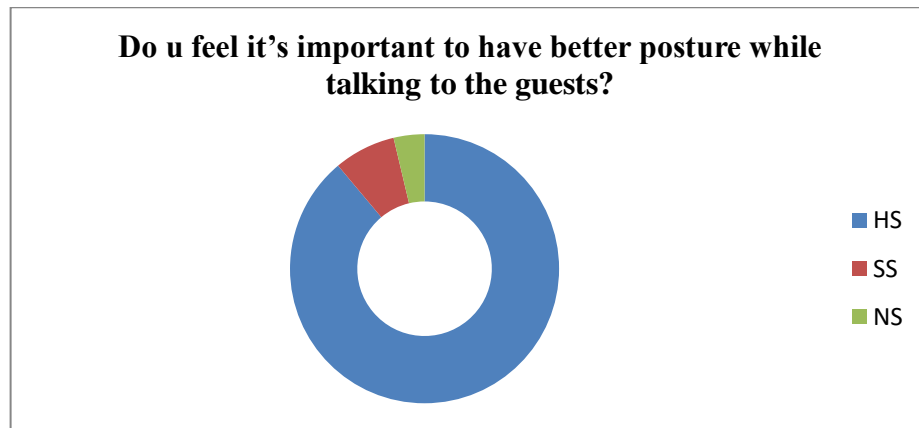
- Listening skills is another important feature of effective communication. It is commendable to know that maximum respondents, 89% state that Listening Skills are highly significant to have effective communication whereas very few respondents feel that it is somewhat significant.

Figure 5

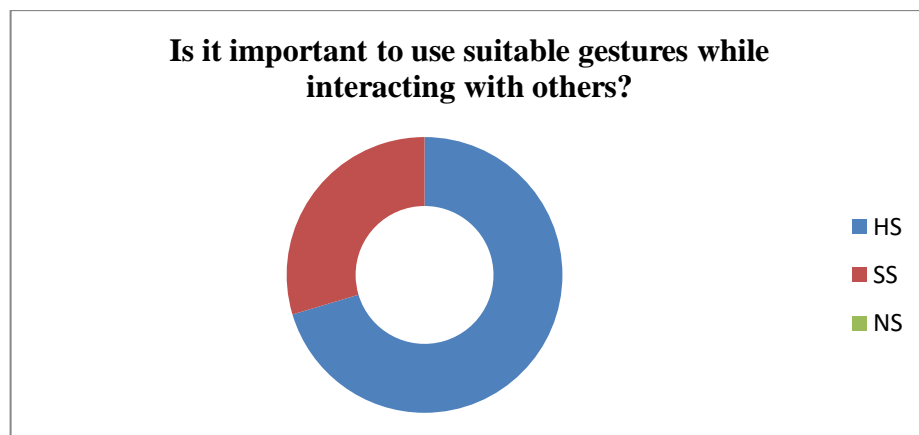
- It is said that a simple smile can be solution to many problems. Smile is a gesture of welcome and should be used by every individual as a first step of interaction. It holds immense importance in the service sector. We all are aware that any product or service which offered with a smile creates a lasting impression upon the minds of the customer. It is recorded that majority of respondents, 60% feel that smile is important gesture while interacting with others. Whereas some respondents feel that smile is not very important while communicating.

Figure 6

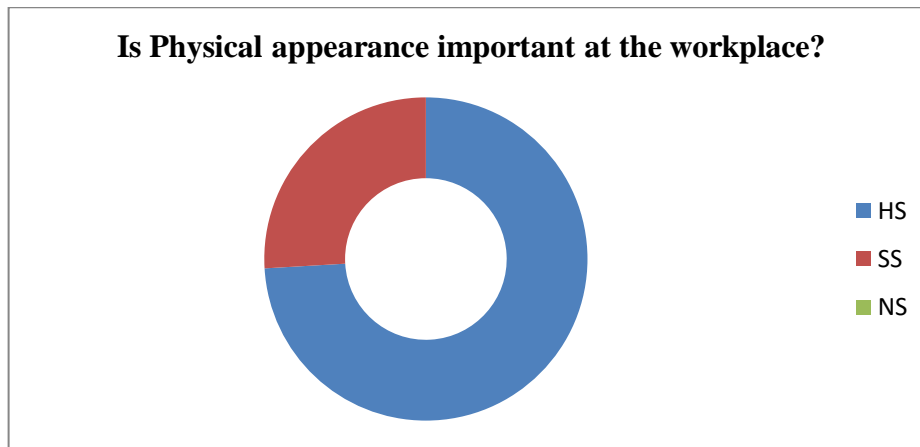
- Maintaining eye contact while talking to others shows that one is confident and has clear thoughts. It also holds the attention of the other individuals during interaction. Majority of the respondents, 78% state that a light smile is essential at the beginning and maybe even during conversation is very significant. Whereas few respondents feel that it is fairly important to have a smile on face during conversation.

Figure 7

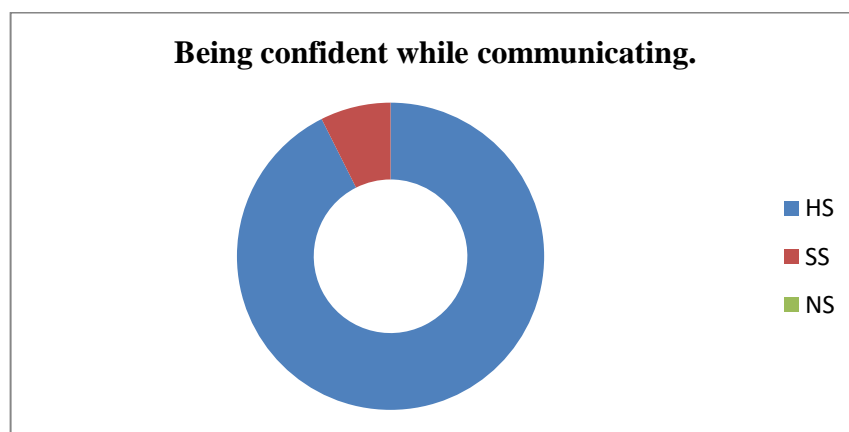
- Expressions and body language is an integral part of communication. It is a part of non-verbal communication but says a lot about an individual and his/ her attitude. Maximum respondents, 89% agree with the fact that an individual must have an appropriate posture while working and while talking with other individuals. While some respondents feel that it is fairly important to have right posture while interacting with the guests or other individuals.

Figure 8

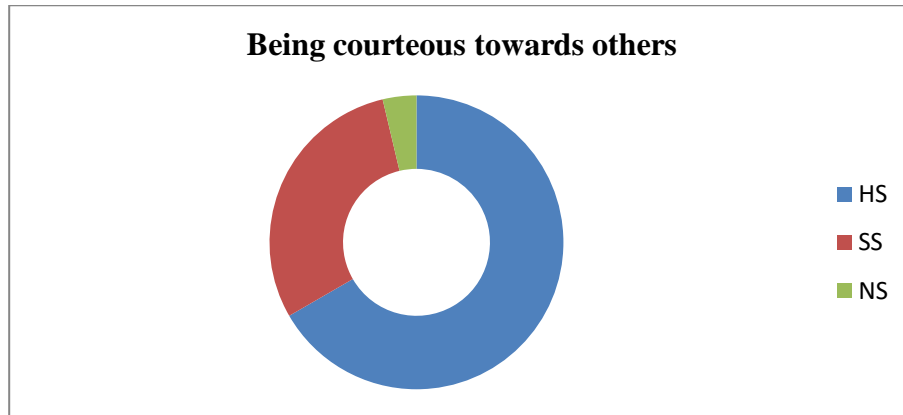
- Another important feature of non-verbal communication is the right gestures i.e. the movement of your hands, facial expressions and overall body movement. It is known that the right kind of gestures will help in achieving the exact effect of communication. The ideas or views can be understood in a better way and will result in effective communication. Majority of the respondents, 70% state that appropriate gestures while interacting help in enhancing the effectiveness of communication and there is better interaction between two or more than two individuals. Some respondents feel that the right gestures hold fair importance in the process of communication.

Figure 9

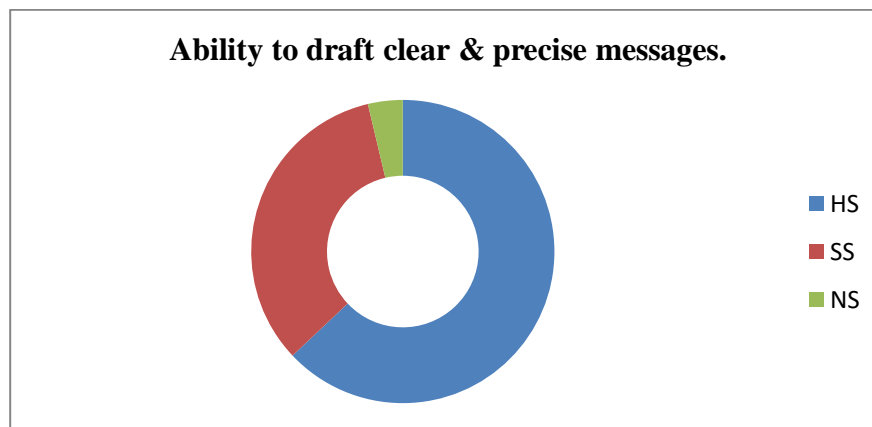
- It is a recognized that first impression is the last impression. The appearance of any individual creates an image of him or her in the mind of the other person even before verbal interaction. It is a way one presents himself or herself in front of others. This is an important skill for the frontline employees in hospitality sector. One should carry pleasant appearance which can be achieved through proper dressing and appropriate body language. Majority of the respondents, 74% opine that the physical appearance is highly significant and plays an important role in effective communication. While few students feel that the appearance of an individual is somewhat important for the process of communication.

Figure 10

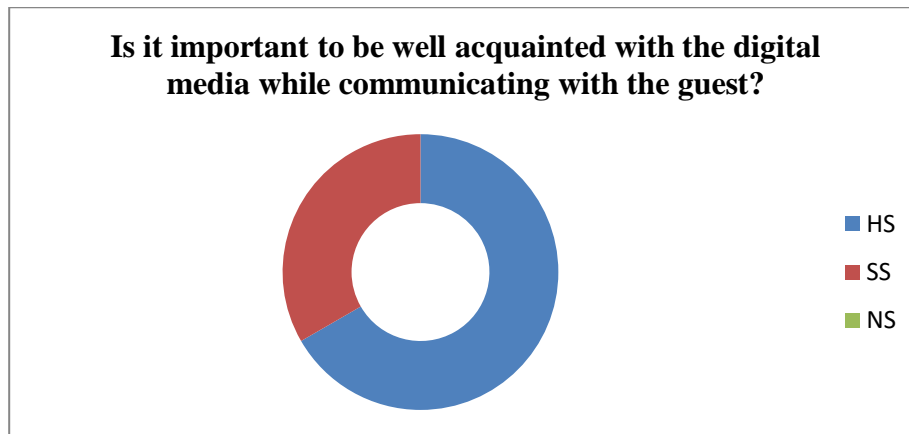
- Confidence helps in putting through the thoughts and ideas in effective way. Conveying your ideas and thoughts to others is the base of communication. Also, it is an attribute for the frontline employees as it may help in handling critical situations, especially with the guests. Maximum students, 93% state that being confident while interacting with others assists in having clear and effective communication. Very few students feel that it is somewhat important to be confident.

Figure 11

- Courtesy and politeness are the foundation of the service industry. These are the most important attributes that each employee must have while interacting with guests as well as colleagues. Most of the respondents, 67% affirm that one has to be courteous while having interactions with other individuals. And some respondents feel that this attribute is fairly important.

Figure 12

- Written communication is another form of communication and is widely used in workplaces. It is essential attribute that one must be able to draft messages which are concise but clear while communicating with others, especially with the guests. This quality is essential while writing for any kind of formal communication in the organization. Majority of the respondents, 63% state that it is essential to be able to draft clear messages, especially which need to be sent to the guests or other employees in the organization.

Figure 13

- Apart from other media of communication, digital media is being used extensively in today's world. One should be familiar with the use of digital media for communication. Most of the respondents, 67% understand the importance of the same and state that one must be aware of the digital media and its use. While few respondents state that being acquainted with the digital media is somewhat important.

7. Conclusion:

From the data received and analyzed, it can be concluded that the hospitality graduates are aware of various aspects of communication. Also, they understand the importance of effective communication in the organization. They have rated the following features of communication as most important.

- Use of professional vocabulary and technical phrases and terms
- Ability to share information & ideas in clear manner
- Importance of voice, pitch & tone
- Listening skills
- Smile while talking or interacting with others
- Maintaining eye-contact while in conversation
- Appropriate expressions and body language
- Physical appearance and right gestures while interacting with others
- Being confident, courteous & polite with others
- Ability to draft clear & precise messages
- Use & importance of digital media

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