

## EFFECTIVE NEGOTIATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR OPTIMIZING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### Abstract

*The management of relationships in the hospitality sector critically depends on the negotiation and communication competencies exercised in interactions with clients, internal relations (management–staff, suppliers, partners), and external relations (online platforms, agencies). This paper proposes an integrated framework of strategies—combining principled negotiation, intercultural communication, digital CRM utilization, and conflict management—for optimizing relationships within tourism and food service establishments. The study argues that the operational and relational success of hospitality organizations is driven not only by service quality but by the systematic ability to negotiate value, communicate clearly and empathetically, and personalize multi-channel interactions. A mixed-method design was employed: a quantitative survey applied to 320 employees and managers, 24 semi-structured interviews with managers and corporate clients, and two comparative case studies (a 4-star urban hotel and a restaurant chain). Results indicate that collaborative negotiation techniques (win–win principle, reasonable anchoring, clear BATNA) combined with structured communication protocols (pre-service briefings, flexible scripts adapted to cultural profiles, feedback routines, and follow-ups) lead to significant increases in customer satisfaction (+12–18%), reduction of internal conflicts (–22%), and higher conversion rates for corporate offers (+9–11%). Implementation of digital CRMs enables personalization and monitoring of negotiation hotspots, fostering long-term client relationships. Intercultural competencies act as significant mediators between communication quality and customer satisfaction, especially in international contexts. The discussion outlines operational and pedagogical practices: pragmatic negotiation training, empathy-based communication, role-play simulations, transparent rate policies, and digital follow-up procedures. The paper contributes theoretically by proposing an integrated “NegCom-Hospitality” model and practically by validating empirically grounded tools offering managers a replicable framework to optimize commercial and operational relationships in hospitality.*

**Keywords:** Collaborative negotiation; Intercultural communication; Hospitality; CRM; Conflict management  
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#### INTRODUCTION

The hospitality sector (hotels, restaurants, catering, events) operates in a complex social environment characterized by repeated, multidimensional interactions among actors: customers, frontline employees, management, suppliers, and digital platforms. In this context, the ability to negotiate advantageous commercial conditions and communicate effectively has a direct impact on performance indicators—satisfaction, loyalty, repeat business, and operational margin. Recent studies show that service quality alone is not enough; the perceived value and the manner in which it is negotiated and communicated are equally vital, especially in competitive and digitalized markets.

Negotiation in hospitality presents specific characteristics: a high frequency of micro-negotiations (last-minute bookings, menu adjustments, complaint compensations), variable bargaining power (corporate clients

vs. walk-ins), and the importance of long-term relationships. Classical techniques (anchoring, BATNA, reciprocal concessions) remain useful but must be adapted to service contexts emphasizing reputation and relational costs. Similarly, communication in hospitality is performative—it shapes expectations, regulates emotions, and repairs relationships. Integrating negotiation techniques with structured communication protocols is thus key to optimizing relational dynamics.

Digitalization (CRM, feedback platforms, social channels) represents a third critical factor. Hospitality businesses leveraging CRM systems to capture client preferences and complaint histories can use these data to personalize negotiations and strengthen the perception of individualized care, enhancing loyalty. Studies highlight that digital capabilities condition the effectiveness of strategic communication and negotiation outcomes, especially in corporate and MICE segments.

Finally, hospitality is inherently intercultural. Employees' intercultural competencies (sensitivity, language adaptation, cultural awareness) mediate the relationship between communication quality and client satisfaction, particularly in international tourism. Miscommunication can trigger conflicts or reputational damage, while appropriate cultural skills enable creative and mutually beneficial solutions.

### MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study adopted a mixed-method (sequential explanatory) design: a quantitative phase (survey) identifying statistical relationships and a qualitative phase (interviews and case studies) exploring underlying mechanisms. This combination enables both generalization and contextual depth.

Sample: 320 participants (managers, supervisors, frontline employees) from 60 hospitality units in Romania and Italy. Additionally, 24 semi-structured interviews and two case studies were conducted. Instruments included structured questionnaires, interview guides, and operational performance indicators (NPS, CSAT, corporate conversion rate). Quantitative data were analyzed using regression and mediation models; qualitative data via thematic coding.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The quantitative analysis revealed statistically significant relationships between negotiation competence, structured communication protocols, and key performance indicators in hospitality operations. Regression models indicated that collaborative negotiation strategies—particularly principled bargaining, calibrated anchoring, and clear articulation of BATNA—were strong predictors of customer satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). These findings align with recent studies emphasizing the strategic weight of negotiation behaviours in hospitality leadership and commercial decision-making (1), as well as with research describing negotiation skills as central levers for

relational value creation within service industries (7).

Communication quality also emerged as a critical determinant of both service experience and internal relational climate. The adoption of structured protocols—pre-service briefings, standardized yet flexible communication scripts, post-service follow-ups, and systematic feedback routines—correlated strongly with reduced conflict frequency ( $-22\%$ ) and shorter resolution times ( $\beta = -0.37$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). These findings support previous research suggesting that consistent communication frameworks enhance team coordination, reduce ambiguity, and improve service consistency (14, 15). The positive impact on customer satisfaction reflects broader evidence that communication is not merely a transactional activity but a performative mechanism shaping expectations, emotional responses, and perceived fairness (5, 9).

Intercultural competencies acted as significant mediators between communication quality and customer satisfaction, particularly in establishments serving international guests. Employees demonstrating sensitivity to cultural norms, adaptive language strategies, and awareness of cross-cultural interaction patterns contributed to significantly higher satisfaction scores among foreign clients. These results are consistent with theoretical perspectives on intercultural communication in tourism, which note that cultural intelligence enables employees to understand and negotiate divergent expectations and behavioural scripts (3, 8, 17). The mediation analysis confirmed that intercultural competence strengthens the relationship between communication clarity and positive client outcomes, reinforcing claims in the literature that intercultural adaptation is a foundational component of hospitality professionalism (16).

The integration of digital CRM systems further amplified these relational mechanisms. CRM usage—tracking customer preferences, documenting complaint histories, automating follow-up messages, and segmenting corporate accounts—was associated with improved negotiation efficiency and higher conversion rates for corporate offers (+9–

11%). The results support findings that digital capabilities mediate the effectiveness of marketing and communication strategies in hospitality (2, 6, 12). Interviewees emphasized that CRM systems assist frontline employees in delivering personalized scripts and recommended responses, thereby reducing negotiation friction and perceived service gaps. This corroborates recent models arguing that personalization and data-driven communication are major drivers of loyalty in digitalized hospitality environments (10, 18).

Qualitative insights deepened these patterns. Interviewed managers consistently described negotiation as a “micro-daily skill,” required in price discussions, complaint handling, menu adaptations, event planning, supplier coordination, and staff scheduling. The case studies demonstrated that establishments investing in negotiation and communication training achieved improvements not only in commercial outcomes but also in internal cohesion. Themes emerging from thematic coding—trust-building, emotional regulation, empathy, clarity of expectations—reflect literature emphasizing the psychological and relational dimensions of negotiation (4, 11). Restaurants and hotels applying empathy-based communication and transparent pricing policies reported reduced reputational risk and enhanced repeat business.

The proposed **NegCom-Hospitality Integrated Framework** synthesizes these findings. It conceptualizes negotiation competence, structured communication, digital tools, and intercultural intelligence as synergistic rather than isolated elements. The framework suggests that relational optimisation in hospitality emerges from the alignment of four mechanisms:

1. **Collaborative negotiation** → reduces dependency on price concessions, increases perceived fairness (7, 11).

2. **Structured communication** → generates consistency, emotional safety, and operational predictability (5, 14).

3. **Digital CRM integration** → strengthens personalization, improves follow-up quality, and supports decision-making (2, 6, 12).

4. **Intercultural competence** → moderates communication impact and enhances service authenticity in globalized markets (3, 8, 17).

The interplay of these components confirms that communication and negotiation cannot be treated as isolated soft skills but as strategic pillars of hospitality management. These findings are consistent with recent approaches framing relational competencies as core drivers of sustainability and long-term competitiveness in hotels and restaurants (9, 13, 19).

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Collaborative negotiation increases customer satisfaction and reduces dependency on discounts.

2. Structured communication protocols decrease conflict frequency and resolution time.

3. CRM capabilities mediate the relationship between communication quality and commercial outcomes.

4. Intercultural competence enhances the positive impact of communication on satisfaction in international contexts.

5. Role-play and simulation training effectively strengthen frontline negotiation skills.

6. Transparent policies reduce friction and strengthen reputation.

7. Combined measures (negotiation + communication + digital tools) generate operational synergy.

8. Implementation requires phased adoption, training, and KPI monitoring.

9. Continuous measurement of CSAT, NPS, and complaints allows quick strategy adjustments.

10. Future research should explore longitudinal effects and cost–benefit ratios of these strategies.

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