

---

## Nonverbal Communication as a Communication Strategy in Hotel Job Interview: A Narrative Inquiry Study

Luh Eka Susanti<sup>1</sup>, Muhamad Nova<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Perhotelan, Institut Pariwisata dan Bisnis Internasional, Denpasar, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Usaha Perjalanan Wisata, Politeknik Negeri Bali, Badung, Indonesia

Email: <sup>1</sup>ekasusanti@ipb-intl.ac.id, <sup>2</sup>muhamadnova@pnb.ac.id

### Abstract

*Nonverbal communication is portrayed as a communication strategy to convey interpersonal communication meaning. This study aimed at identifying the types of nonverbal communication applied by the job applicant in a hotel job interview and the users' perspective toward the nonverbal communication applied as a communication strategy. This study employed a qualitative study with narrative inquiry design by interviewing one experienced human resources officer and 2 human resources managers. The data were gathered through interviews in different sections with different informants. The interview was recorded and transcribed. The interview transcription was analyzed to identify the tendency of the informant's answers. The result showed that the most nonverbal communication occurring in hotel job interview include body language, voice tone, and grooming. The human resources managers and staffs, as an interviewer, prefer to have good attitude over good knowledge. This implied that hotel job applicants must be aware on their body language, voice tone, and grooming before attending a job interview.*

**Keywords:** *Communication Strategy, Hotel Job Interview, Nonverbal Communication*

### Abstrak

Komunikasi nonverbal digambarkan sebagai sebuah strategi komunikasi untuk memberikan makna komunikasi interpersonal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi jenis komunikasi nonverbal yang diterapkan oleh pelamar kerja dalam wawancara kerja hotel dan perspektif pengguna terhadap komunikasi nonverbal yang diterapkan sebagai strategi komunikasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan studi kualitatif dengan desain inkuiri naratif dengan mewawancarai satu orang petugas sumber daya manusia yang berpengalaman dan 2 orang manajer sumber daya manusia. Data dari penelitian ini dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dalam situasi yang berbeda dengan informan berbeda. Wawancara yang dilaksanakan direkam dan ditranskripsi. Kemudian, hasil transkripsi wawancara dianalisa guna mengidentifikasi kecenderungan dari jawaban para informan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa komunikasi nonverbal yang paling banyak meliputi bahasa tubuh, nada suara, dan dandanan. Para manajer dan staf sumber daya manusia, sebagai seorang pewawancara, lebih suka memiliki sikap yang baik daripada pengetahuan yang baik. Ini menyiratkan bahwa pelamar kerja hotel harus menyadari bahasa tubuh, nada suara, dan dandanan mereka sebelum menghadiri wawancara kerja.

**Kata Kunci:** Komunikasi Nonverbal, Strategi Komunikasi, Wawancara Kerja Hotel

## INTRODUCTION

Communication plays an important role in maintaining relationship among human. People interact and transfer some pieces of information to each other through communication (Mandal, 2014). In sharing information, people commonly use two modes of communication, which is termed as verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication refers to any words, either spoken or written, which convey a piece of information (Zand et al., 2020) and people can easily recognize the core of information and process it directly. On the other hand, nonverbal communication uses other form of communication to convey information without using words or verbal language, such as gestures, tones, and facial expressions (Hashmi & Waheed, 2020) which requires special treatment or analysis process.

In its application, there are several aspects that can be recognized as a cue for nonverbal communication (Muhammad & Mahmood, 2021). Facial expression is the first aspect that can be recognized for nonverbal cue since people tend to express their emotion through face, such as sadness, happiness, fear, or anger. Then, nonverbal cue can also be detected through body movement and postures, including the way how people stand, walk, or sit while talking to other people. Next, the gestures also help to express nonverbal cue in communication, which includes the use of hands or fingers in explaining. Eye contact also contributes as a nonverbal cue in communication as it could express interest, affection, and attraction toward the other speaker. Then, having some touches can also be identified as a nonverbal cue, especially indicating the close relationship, including handshake, hug, pat on the back, or pad on shoulder. Besides, vocal tone, pitch, and pauses while speaking can be used as a nonverbal cue in communication. Time also can indicate one's nonverbal cue as it refers to personal interest toward person or event, i.e. being punctual on a meeting. Last, personal space plays one role to indicate the comfort of someone toward the other speaker as the distance may indicate the level of close relationship. However, not all people could be aware of nonverbal cue while interacting to each other (Zhang, 2021).

Even though it is rather difficult to recognize, non-verbal communication has some functions to interpersonal communication. Some gestures in non-verbal communication could be an aid to emphasize a message or information (Muhammad & Mahmood, 2021). People use their fingers while explaining to count or to emphasize the number of topic that they have shared. On the other hand, they can also stress the voice tone on certain words in the utterance to highlight the important part or the point that they want to emphasize. Non-verbal communication can also express personal's character or attitude toward the discussion or utterances given by the other speaker (Kidwell & Hasford, 2014). In one study, it reflected that a person who gives firm handshake tend to show assertiveness and trust toward the other people (Nagy et al., 2020). Besides, having proper eye contact with the audience also employs to show inner confidence, while too much may indicate some aggressiveness (Kidwell & Hasford, 2014). Head scratching also indicates nervousness and less comfort toward the talk (Whitehouse et al., 2022). Different study also unraveled that nonverbal cues through facial expressions could also convey additional meaning which cannot be expressed by words, such as personal feeling (Rezer, 2021) or emotional state (Samara et al., 2022), including sadness, happiness, fear, or anger (Hashmi & Waheed, 2020). As a consequence, having certain gestures and facial expressions could also affect listeners' feeling and attitude (King et al., 2020), i.e. rolling eyes to show offensiveness, or yawning to show boredom.

In business communication, the mastery of nonverbal communication becomes an essential competence which needs to be acquired by the employees. Employees need to show their interest through some nonverbal signals during their interaction with the client.

The way how the employee reacts or responses towards client's request will affect the output of clients' attitude (Shadaydeh et al., 2021). The employee needs to have proper manner in dealing with the customer needs by employing appropriate nonverbal techniques, such as open body language, good eye contact, and smiling (Novotny et al., 2021) to show friendliness (Renier et al., 2021) and kindness (Zand et al., 2020). With proper nonverbal technique, the client or customer will start to enjoy the conversation and indirectly it will impact to listener's attitude and emotions (Anuradha & Singh, 2020). This also employs positive experience for the customer and shapes positive perception toward the services given (Mosa, 2021). Thus, non-verbal communication becomes one of the essential communication competencies to master in business contexts (Ananda et al., 2020; Pereira & Hone, 2021).

Since nonverbal cue plays an essential value in communication, companies tend to put nonverbal cue as one of the aspect they value in a job interview. In tourism industry, for instance, the users, i.e. Human Resource of the hotel, identify how the job applicants employ the nonverbal communication while answering several questions given to them, and figure out whether the job applicants answer the questions confidently or doubtfully. Reflecting on how the users in tourism industry value the nonverbal cue, the current study investigated the core essence of nonverbal communication as a communication strategy in a job interview. The current study aimed to unravel the common nonverbal communication employed by job applicants during hotel job interview and the users' perspective on the nonverbal communication employed by job applicants. Therefore, the current study proposed two research questions as follow:

1. What are the common nonverbal communications employed by job applicants during hotel job interview?
2. How is the users' perspective on the nonverbal communication employed by job applicants?

## **METHODS**

The present study employed qualitative research with a narrative inquiry approach in identifying the users' perspective on non-verbal communication as a communication strategy in hotel job interview. The current study focuses on exploring the users' personal experience story on interviewing several hotel job applicants during their past work. This research design enabled deeper exploration on an individual's personal experience in a certain episode or situation (Creswell & Clark, 2007), which is related to the application of non-verbal communication as a communication strategy during a job interview.

In conducting the study, there were three informants becoming the source of information. These informants work in human resource department in three different 5-star hotels in Bali as Human Resource staff and Human Resource Director. These informants were purposively selected as they have experiences in conducting interviews with several hotel job applicants during their past work. Pseudonyms were given to these informants, R1, R2 and R3, as the consent of personal information privacy in conducting the study.

In collecting the data, the present study conducted interview and collected some pieces of documentation. The interview was conducted in separated situation which focused on collecting each individual's personal experience on conducting an interview with several hotel job applicants during the past work. The questions proposed in the interview were arranged to collect some information related to non-verbal communications employed by the hotel job applicants during the interview and the informants' perspective toward the use of non-verbal communication as a communication strategy in hotel job interview. The answers of each question in the interview were recorded into descriptive notes. Furthermore, to gain deeper explanation, the informants were also required to provide

some pieces of documents vis-à-vis their prior interviews with the job applicants. These documents helped them to recall their past memory in conducting the interviews.

The results of the data collection were then analyzed following the qualitative data analysis phases with three phases (Miles et al., 2014). The analysis was initiated by reducing some redundant and irrelevant data toward the research question proposed. Then, they were coded and distributed into certain themes covering the types of nonverbal communication occurring in hotel job interview and the users' perspective on nonverbal communication as a communication strategy in hotel job interview. Then, a further interpretation was also created based on the themes found in the informants' stories.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **Procedures of Interview**

These three informants have been working in the field of Human Resources for a dozen years as a staff and director of Human Resources, which means that they have conducted many job interviews with prospective employees. R1 and R3 generally conduct one-on-one interviews because it takes time to get to know applicants deeper and is carried out in the HR room so as not to be disturbed by hotel operations. Interviews were conducted in stages starting with HR, users (Dept. Head), and General Manager. As for R2, interviews were conducted in the form of groups (3 on 1), so that in 1 interview session there was 1 applicant who was interviewed by 3 people directly, namely HR, user (Dept. Head), and General Manager. Generally, interviews are also conducted not in the HR room but in the lobby or balcony near the lobby. However, if during rush hours (many guests check in or check out), the interview can be conducted in any open area. This is done to avoid the impression of tension and to make the situation more relaxed to make all parties feel more comfortable. All informants have interviewed hundreds of prospective employees for all positions, from staff to department heads and have experiences in seeing the various characteristics of employees at the hotel.

### **Non-Verbal Communication Used in Interview**

In every interview, the use of Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication is always involved. However, the focus of this research is the use of non-verbal communication in the job recruitment process, especially in the job interview session. The non-verbal communication that is focused on in this study is body language (facial expression, eye contact, smile, head movement, hand-shaking, seating position), voice tone and grooming (dress and make up).

### **Body language**

The use of body language in job interviews includes facial expressions, eye contact, smiles, head movements, hand-shaking, and seating positions. All informants believe the presence of all types of body language shown by the applicant in all job interview sessions. Facial expressions reflect a person's emotions. This is also seen during the interview, for example sad, happy, nervous, flat. These four types of expressions generally dominate the applicants' facial expressions. For a flat facial expression (expressionless) that makes the informant confused because there is no significant expression shown by the applicant, it creates the impression of being indifferent and not caring about the surrounding environment.

In addition to facial expressions, eye contact is body language that is easy to notice. Almost all of the informant's responses were the same, namely there were applicants who always used eye contact, rarely made eye contact and some even almost never used eye contact, only occasionally when saying opening and closing greetings. In some situations, it is realized that the applicant will not always make direct eye contact with the

interviewer, this can be seen for example when nervous or when looking for answers to questions asked. Generally, applicants look up, sideways or stare at the table.

Moreover, hand-shakes and hand-movement also play a very important role in the involvement of the use of body language in job interviews. How to shake hands or how to respond to handshakes by applicants also determines their characteristics and personality. This also taken into consideration as first impression by the interviewer. This is highly trusted by R1 where handshakes are still common and the main thing to do besides greetings before the start of the interview. With greetings and handshakes, it will make the atmosphere more comfortable and afterwards the interviewer's assessment process begins.

However, different treatment occurred for R2 and R3 during the pandemic which continues until now where the hand-shake is no longer applied to start a job interview. The applicant's response to a handshake can determine their individual characteristics. The more firm applicants do a hand-shake, it shows more optimism, this also has an impact on the confidence that arises when giving answers during the interview. Other hand movements can be seen during the interview process where it is not uncommon for applicants to play writing instruments such as pens and tapping on the table, or some are tapping their fingers. Almost all of these movements are seen when the applicant is listening to the interviewer's directions or questions, while thinking about looking for answers or even covering their nervousness. R3 also added that there are significant hand movements which are generally shown by applicants who are more senior or have high and professional work experience, namely sitting idly by when listening to or responding to answers from interviewers.

### **Voice tone**

When a person speaks, the tone of his/her voice will be different depending on the mood. People who are happy compared with people who are disappointed will definitely be different when they are talking. The high and low voice, the softness of the voice, and the presence of a speaker in speaking also contributed to the interview. Each applicant has a different type of voice and speaking style. From how to respond to the questions given, the interviewer can see the different speaking styles of the applicant. The applicant's nervousness can also be seen from the tone of voice and filler (e.g. the use of e...e....). Filler is something spontaneously uttered by the applicant which is generally said when thinking or connecting one thing to another when speaking. However, the use of filler that is dominant or too much can also interfere with the interview process. Quantitatively excessive filler in a job interview can be a distracting point.

### **Grooming**

Another non-verbal communication is grooming which includes dress and make up. The use of outfit and make-up is the first thing that can be seen before going further in the interview procedure. Even before greeting, this is an obvious defining point. The way applicants dress when conducting job interviews can represent their personality, where there are applicants who wear white shirts and black pants or skirts (as common thing), but some are more fashionable with other colors (even tend to be bright) and have patterns. For facial make-up, all respondents believe that male applicants do not need make-up that is too flashy and perfume that smells too strong. For the interview session, male applicants only need to concern to the neatness of the face where there is no excessive mustache or beard, and facial piercing. As for female applicants, all respondents believe that for direct guest contact section, employees who look attractive are needed with sufficient and not too much make-up.

### **Users' Perspective**

Because all respondents are practitioners who have worked in the field of human resources for a dozen years, they understand the characteristics of the applicant in the recruitment process. There are also many applicants with good product knowledge and high working hours but seem arrogant and overconfident. On the other hand, there are also applicants with sufficient product knowledge but high enthusiasm to be part of the hotel. For all of the above, the selected applicants were applicants with good non-verbal communication than applicants with good product knowledge. R2 believes that applicants with a high willingness to learn and grooming and a good attitude are more reliable to join the team. Product knowledge can be learned as the applicant joins the team, but an arrogant and overconfident attitude will be more difficult to control because it is a person's character that is quite difficult to change and takes a relatively long time.

### **CONCLUSION**

Common non-verbal communication found in job interviews were a) body language (facial expression, eye contact, smile, head movement, hand-shaking, seating position), b) voice tone and c) grooming (dress and make up). Both verbal and non-verbal communication plays an important role to see the characteristics of the applicant, but the three respondents tend to choose applicants with good non-verbal communication, such as gesture and body language as well as a polite attitude. In addition, they believe that product knowledge can be learned, but attitude is something that concerns a person's characteristics and it takes a long time to change it towards the hotel standard.

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This research was supported by Institut Pariwisata dan Bisnis Internasional, Denpasar.

### **DAFTAR PUSTAKA**

- Ananda, J., Solihat, D., & Suryana, Y. (2020). Nonverbal communication performed by foreign English teacher. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 6(2): 175-188. DOI: 10.25134/ieflj.v6i2.3424.
- Anuradha & Singh, S. N. (2020). Impact of nonverbal signals in business communication. *UGC Care Journal*, 43(4): 60-65.
- Hashmi, M. & Waheed, M. (2020). Discerning goodness via nonverbal cues: Perspectives from highcontext cultures. *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 20(3): 74-88.
- Kidwell, B. & Hasford, J. (2014). Emotional ability and nonverbal communication. *Psychology and Marketing*, 31(7): 526–538
- King, J. P. J., Loy, J. E., Rohde, H., & Corley, M. (2019). Interpreting nonverbal cues to deception in real time. *PLoS ONE* 15(3), pp. 1-25. DOI:10.17605/OSF.IO/KXJ2B.
- Mandal, F. B. (2014). Nonverbal communication in humans. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 24(4): 417-421. DOI: 10.1080/10911359.2013.831288
- Mosa, R. A. (2021). The nonverbal communication and its influence on customer perceptions towards service encounter: An empirical study in the Iraqi banking service. *European Journal of Management and Marketing Studies*, 7(1): 142-163. DOI: 10.46827/ejmms.v7i1.1200.

- Muhammad, H. A. & Mahmood, R. F. (2021). A Pragmatic analysis of proxemics as a nonverbal communicator with reference to the concept of social distancing during covid-19 pandemic. *Zanco: Journal of Humanity & Science*, 25(5): 304-312. DOI:10.21271/zjhs.25.5.20.
- Nagy, E. Farkas, T. Guy, F. Stafylarakis, A. (2019). Effects of handshake duration on other nonverbal behavior. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 0(0): 1–23. DOI: 10.1177/0031512519876743.
- Novotny, E., Frank, M. G., & Grizzard, M. (2021). A laboratory study comparing the effectiveness of verbal and nonverbal rapport-building techniques in interviews. *Communication Studies*, pp. 1-15. DOI: 10.1080/10510974.2021.1975141.
- Pereira, M. & Hone, K. (2021). Communication skills training intervention based on automated recognition of nonverbal signals. In *CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '21), May 08– 13, 2021, Yokohama, Japan*, pp. 1 - 14. DOI: 10.1145/3411764.3445324.
- Renier, L. A., Mast, M. S., Dael, N. & Kleinlogel, E. P. (2021). Nonverbal social sensing: What social sensing can and cannot do for the study of nonverbal behavior from video. *Front. Psychol*, 12: 1-8. DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.606548
- Rezer, T. (2020). Nonverbal communication in public administration: Modern challenges. In *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, pp. 2717 – 2722. DOI: 10.15405/epsbs.2021.05.373.
- Samara, I., Roth, T. S., Nikolic, M., Prochazkova, E., & Kret, M. E. (2022). Can third-party observers detect attraction in others based on subtle nonverbal cues? *Current Psychology*, pp. 1-16. DOI: 10.1007/s12144-022-02927-0.
- Shadaydeh, M., Müller, L., Schneider, D., Thümmel, M., Kessler, T., & Denzler, J. (in press). Analyzing the direction of emotional influence in nonverbal dyadic communication: A facial-expression study. DOI: 0.1109/ACCESS.2021.
- Whitehouse, J., Milward, S. J., Parker, M. O., Kavanagh, E., & Waller, B. M. (2022). Signal value of stress behavior. *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 4(2022): 325-333. DOI: 10.1016/j.evolhumbehav.2022.04.001.
- Zand, S., Baradaran, M., Najafi, F., Mousavi, A. M., & Mahdipour, A. G. (2020) Culture and gender in nonverbal communication. *Rooyesh-e-Ravanshenasi*, 8(11): 123-130.
- Zhang, M. (2021). Research on cross-cultural differences in nonverbal communication between America and China. In *Proceedings of the 2021 5th International Seminar on Education, Management and Social Sciences (ISEMSS 2021)*, pp. 954-957