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# The Role of Photographer-Client Interpersonal Communication in Improving Working Relationships and Satisfaction in Creative Agency Photography Services

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#### ABSTRACT

#### Keywords

Interpersonal Communication; Social Exchange Theory; Work Relationships; Service Satisfaction; Creative Agency Photography

This study aims to analyze the role of interpersonal communication, between photographers and clients in efforts to improve working relationships and satisfaction in creative agency photography services. Good and effective communication between the two parties is considered very important in creating a harmonious working relationship and leading to increased quality and work results and client satisfaction. Using the Social Exchange Theory (SET), this study will examine how the photography process, such as trust, fulfilment of client expectations and desires, and commitment to creative photography projects. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews. with creative agency photographers and clients who have worked together in creative agencies. The results of the study show that open and transparent communication can improve better and stronger working relationships, enrich client experiences, and increase satisfaction with the results of the photos obtained. This study provides an understanding and insight into the importance of interpersonal communication in the context of the creative industry and how communication can stimulate overall work results and client satisfaction.

#### 1. Introduction

The creative industry, especially photography services in creative agencies, is growing rapidly along with the increasing demand for visuals in various sectors, from marketing, advertising, to social media content creation. Photography has become an important tool in visual communication that influences audience perception and brand identity (Xie & Sun, 2021). Photography not only functions as a medium to capture moments, but also as a communication tool that conveys messages and strengthens identity. In this context, the relationship between the photographer and the client greatly determines the success of a photography project. Research shows that effective interpersonal communication between photographers and clients can increase client trust and satisfaction with the services provided (Ihsan, 2023). In addition, good communication between photographers and clients, both verbally and nonverbally, can create trust and satisfaction during and after the photo shoot session (Asral et al., 2022). Thus, good interaction between photographers and clients not only affects the quality of the photo results, but also the overall success of the photography project. A study by Hernández et al. (2018) showed that the quality of the relationship between service providers and clients affects the level of satisfaction, which can lead to long-term cooperation. The relationship between the photographer and the client plays a very important role in determining the success of the project. An effective relationship will be greatly influenced by good interpersonal communication between the two parties, where a shared understanding of the client's goals and expectations is key to creating satisfactory results (Chowdhury, 2020).

Interpersonal communication is a process of interaction that occurs between individuals with the aim of achieving mutual understanding, either through verbal or non-verbal communication (Griffin,

2012). In the context of photography services, this communication includes many aspects, such as discussions about the expected results, understanding the client's vision, and feedback on the results of the photos after the photo shoot. Effective communication can reduce uncertainty in the relationship between photographer and client and increase trust, which in turn increases client satisfaction with the work. Research shows that effective interpersonal communication between photographers and clients can increase client trust and satisfaction with the services provided (Asral et al., 2022). Research by (Liu & Jiang, 2021) shows that good communication can reduce misunderstandings and promote more productive working relationships. Conversely, poor communication can lead to disappointment that has a negative impact on client satisfaction. For example, a study found that ineffective service communication has a significant effect on decreasing customer loyalty (Rahayu Bella Kartika et al., 2023).

Satisfaction theory explains that client satisfaction is influenced by their experience in receiving services, from initial communication to the final results received. For example, in photography services, client satisfaction depends not only on the technical quality of the photo results but also on their overall experience during the communication process with the photographer. (Adawiyah et al., n.d.) explain that the polite and friendly attitude of employees, as well as good bonds with clients, plays an important role in increasing consumer satisfaction in photography services. In addition, research by Widhi Astiti et al. (2022) found that customer experience, creativity, and innovation have a significant influence on consumer satisfaction in studio photography services. Thus, a good service experience, including effective communication between photographers and clients, is a key factor in achieving client satisfaction. This shows that good communication is a determining factor in creating a positive experience that leads to client satisfaction (Liu & Jiang, 2021). Further research (Sakti, 2023) also revealed that effective communication can improve service quality, which in turn increases client satisfaction and loyalty.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) offers a relevant theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between photographers and clients. SET assumes that individuals seek to maximize the benefits gained and minimize the losses in their social interactions (Blau, 1964). In the context of photography, this theory can be used to analyze how communication functions as a form of exchange, where both parties seek to achieve mutually beneficial goals (Babin & Darden, 2018). For example, the photographer provides satisfactory work, while the client provides positive feedback and pays for the services provided. Hamandia & Amelia (2021) show that in the client-photographer relationship, good communication quality functions as a form of social exchange that enhances the relationship between the two parties, as well as contributing to the client's loyalty to the photographer.

According to Monge and Contractor (West & Lynn H. Turner, 2008), Social Exchange Theory states that individuals evaluate the value of a relationship by subtracting the sacrifices made from the rewards received. If the value obtained is positive, the relationship tends to continue; conversely, if it is negative, the relationship may end (West & Lynn H. Turner, 2008). In the context of interpersonal communication, its effectiveness can be measured through five main dimensions proposed by Devito & Maulana (1997), namely openness, empathy, supportive attitude, positive attitude, and equality. Openness reflects honesty and transparency in sharing information; empathy is the ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of others; supportive attitude shows encouragement and support between individuals; positive attitude relates to an optimistic and constructive view in interactions; and equality emphasizes equal treatment regardless of status or other differences. By applying these five dimensions of interpersonal communication, the relationship between photographers and clients can be strengthened, thereby increasing satisfaction and sustainability of cooperation.

Trust is an important element in interpersonal relationships that can strengthen cooperation between photographers and clients. Reimann et al., (2017) explain that relationships based on trust allow clients to feel comfortable in giving honest instructions or feedback, which makes it easier for photographers to adjust the work according to client expectations. Trust built through good communication can create stronger and mutually beneficial bonds, which in turn increase client satisfaction with the results provided (Puspitasari & Febrianti, 2024). On the other hand, the commitment built in the relationship is also an important factor in creating long-term loyalty (Gundlach et al., 1995). Research by Alacovska et al. (2024) shows that commitment in business

relationships built on trust can increase opportunities for ongoing cooperation and positive recommendations from clients, highlighting the role of interpersonal communication in shaping job satisfaction and ongoing business relationships.

However, although interpersonal communication and SET theory have been widely applied in customer relationships in other sectors, research that specifically examines communication between photographers and clients in photography services is still limited. Most of the existing studies focus more on the technical aspects of photography and do not delve deeper into the dynamics of communication that affect client relationships and satisfaction. Therefore, this study aims to explore further how interpersonal communication can affect working relationships and client satisfaction and how SET can be applied to understand the social exchange process in this context.

This study is expected to provide deeper insight into the importance of interpersonal communication in improving the quality of photography services and client satisfaction. The findings of this study are also expected to contribute to more effective communication practices between photographers and clients in creative agencies, as well as increasing understanding of how good communication relationships can strengthen working relationships and improve the overall client experience.

Social Exchange Theory (SET) emerged in the late 1950s and has since developed into a large body of research on social behaviour. This theory has been widely used to explain utilitarian and sociological views of relationships in social networks (Blau, 1964). The emergence and development of this theory are largely attributed to the works of John Thibaut, George Homans, Peter Blau, and Harold Kelley. They were interested in small group psychology, aiming to understand interpersonal relationships in communities and dyadic relationships (Emerson, 1976).

Social exchange theory (SET) is one of the standards for understanding behaviour in the workplace (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This is a very common phenomenon that is embedded in our daily lives. Exchanges are not limited to organizations but can also be extended to our family, friends and relatives. Cropanzano et al. (2017) define SET as (i) an initiative by the actor towards the target, (ii) a reciprocal attitudinal or behavioral response from the target, and (iii) the resulting relationship. Relationships in today's corporate world are becoming increasingly complex (Chernyak-Hai & Rabenu, 2018). Therefore, there is a need to update SET with the increasing complexity of how organizations operate and how employees behave (Cooper-Thomas & Morrison, 2018). Social exchange theory focuses on the fact that individuals form a type of relationship based on perceived costs and benefits. Peer relationships will serve as a critical factor in improving and enhancing work motivation (Bate, 2025).

R. Wayne Pace (1979) explains that interpersonal communication is a communication process between two or more people directly, where the sender can convey the message directly and the recipient can receive and respond to the message directly. The functions of interpersonal communication include improving relationships between individuals, avoiding and handling personal conflicts, reducing uncertainty, and sharing knowledge and experiences with others.

Effendy (1986) states that, in essence, interpersonal communication is communication between a communicator and a communicant. This type of communication is considered the most effective for changing human attitudes, opinions, or behavior due to its dialogic process. According to its characteristics, interpersonal communication can be divided into two types, namely dyadic communication and small group communication. Dyadic communication is a communication process between two individuals in a face-to-face situation that can occur in three forms according to R. Wayne Pace (1979): conversation, dialogue, and interview. Conversation occurs in a relaxed and informal atmosphere. Dialogue occurs in a more intimate, in-depth, and personal situation. Interviews, on the other hand, are more serious in nature, with one party dominating the examination and the other party acting as the respondent.

Ineffective interpersonal communication occurs when barriers in communication are not resolved properly, which has the potential to damage interpersonal relationships. According to Agus M. Hardjana (2003), interpersonal communication is considered effective when the recipient of the

message understands the sender's intentions and acts voluntarily without pressure so that barriers in communication can be overcome and the quality of interpersonal relationships increases. Effective interpersonal communication provides benefits to both parties by facilitating the formation and maintenance of good relationships between individuals, the delivery of knowledge or information, changes in attitudes and behavior, solving problems between people, improving self-image, and paving the way to success.

Several communication barriers emerge from the application of SET in the context of photography. One major barrier is the difficulty in establishing a clear understanding of the client's expectations. This can be caused by the client not having a deep understanding of the technical aspects of photography, leading to misunderstandings about what can be achieved within the time and budget given. (Arni Muhammad, 2009)

Another barrier is the photographer's need to maintain their creative vision with the client's expectations. This can be a sensitive process, as the photographer must navigate between their creative vision and meeting the client's needs. SET suggests that this tension can be overcome by establishing clear communication channels and ensuring that both parties are aware of the resources being exchanged (Arni Muhammad, 2009).

### 2. Method

Data collection methods are techniques or ways obtained by researchers to collect data. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the dynamics of interpersonal communication in the context of photography services.

The subjects of this study were photographers working in creative agencies and clients who had used their photography services. The sampling technique was carried out purposively, by selecting participants who had experience and involvement in creative agency photography services. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with photographers and clients, as well as direct observation of interactions that occurred in the photography service process. In addition, related documents such as work contracts, photographer portfolios, and feedback from clients were also analyzed to gain a more comprehensive understanding.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis techniques, where the data obtained were categorized based on themes that emerged from interviews and observations. The analysis process involved data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, this study used source and method triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from various participants, while method triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and document analysis.

The use of data triangulation aims to ensure the validity and strength of the findings in this study. Use of Method Triangulation Using more than one data collection method, such as semi-structured interviews and direct observation. By combining these two methods, researchers can gain a more comprehensive perspective on the communication barriers experienced by photographers and clients. And combining with source triangulation: Collecting data from various different sources, such as photographers, clients, and project managers at creative agencies. According to Sugiyono (2020), source triangulation is defined as a technique for collecting data from different sources. Data is said to be valid if there is consistency or conformity between the information provided by one informant and another. By combining views from several sources, researchers can broaden the scope and deepen their understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

#### 3. Result and Discussion

Interpersonal communication in photography services in creative agencies plays an important role in improving working relationships and client satisfaction (Ihsan, 2023). This study aims to explore how communication between photographers and clients affects working relationships and client satisfaction in photography services in creative agencies. Data were collected through interviews with photographers and clients, as well as observations during photo shoots, to understand how

interpersonal communication affects the quality of working relationships and service satisfaction. This study refers to the Social Exchange Theory (SET), which emphasises that good communication can strengthen mutually beneficial working relationships (Blau, 1964).

Effective communication between photographers and clients has a significant impact on the shooting experience and the final outcome. Based on interviews conducted with photographers, it was found that open and clear communication allows photographers to better understand the needs of their clients. Before a photoshoot, photographers have a discussion with clients to ensure their expectations are aligned with what can be achieved. One photographer stated:

"Before the session, I always ask about their expectations. During the session, I give directions, and after, I show the results and ask for feedback" (Photographer 1, 2024).

This shows that ongoing and open communication is a major factor in the success of a photoshoot.

In addition, the client's involvement in active communication during the photo shoot also plays an important role in building trust. One client stated :

"I feel more comfortable when the photographer gives me the opportunity to express my opinions regarding poses and lighting" (Client 2, 2024).

This shows that two-way communication between photographers and clients creates a more flexible and conducive working atmosphere. (Xie & Sun, 2021) shows that open communication in the creative industry can increase client trust and satisfaction.

On the aspect of expectation management, photographers revealed that they often have to educate clients about the technical limitations of photography.

"Sometimes clients come with photo references from social media that don't match the lighting conditions available. I have to explain to them how the lighting and props available will affect the final result" (Photographer 3, 2024).

(Widhi Astiti et al., 2022) supports this finding, where customer experience, creativity, and innovation in photography services are important factors in building consumer satisfaction.

Effective interpersonal communication is also related to the level of client loyalty. (Liu & Jiang, 2021) States that good communication can reduce misunderstandings and promote more productive working relationships. In the context of photography, effective communication not only helps in explaining technical aspects but also builds long-term relationships between photographers and clients.

In the context of social exchange theory, interpersonal communication between photographers and clients can be understood as a form of ongoing and mutually beneficial social exchange. Blau (1964) stated that social relationships persist if both parties feel they have benefitted from the interaction. In this study, it was found that photographers who build effective communication not only meet client expectations but also improve their own professionalism. Meanwhile, clients who feel heard and understood will be more satisfied with the final result and are more likely to use the services of the same photographer again. Thus, good interpersonal communication not only increases momentary satisfaction but also creates long-term loyalty.

Research (Puspitasari & Febrianti, 2024) confirms that the effectiveness of communication between service providers and clients has a direct impact on customer satisfaction levels. This can be seen in a photographer's statement:

"I maintain client satisfaction by always ensuring clear communication about expectations, processes, and outcomes" (Photographer 3, 2024).

This statement shows that clear communication is not only a tool to avoid misunderstandings but also a mechanism to build trust and improve the overall service experience. In line with research by Gundlach et al. (1995), long-term relationships between service providers and clients can be strengthened through open and transparent communication.

The openness dimension in photographer-client communication is seen from the photographer's transparency in providing information about the results that can be achieved. One client stated :

"The photographer always tells me about how the session will go and makes sure I feel comfortable" (Client 2, 2024).

This shows that openness plays a role in forming realistic expectations for clients, which ultimately impacts their level of satisfaction. An atmosphere of openness can be created if photographers and clients can communicate openly and honestly with one another (Midianto, 2019).

In addition to openness, empathy is also a key factor in effective interpersonal communication. Devito & Maulana (1997) stated that empathy allows service providers to understand the needs and expectations of clients, which can improve the quality of interactions and results obtained. One photographer stated:

"I always try to understand the client's wishes and adjust my direction so that they feel comfortable" (Photographer 4, 2024).

This statement shows that photographers who are able to empathise with clients are more likely to create a pleasant experience, which in turn increases client loyalty to their services. Reimann et al. (2017) emphasized that trust formed through good interpersonal communication contributes to customer loyalty.

Other dimensions of interpersonal communication theory (Devito & Maulana, 1997), such as supportiveness and positive attitudes, also have important implications for photographer-client relationships. Photographers who provide direction in a supportive and constructive manner can increase clients' confidence during a photo shoot. One client expressed:

"The photographer was very supportive and gave me suggestions that helped me feel more confident when having my photos taken" (Client 3, 2024).

This suggests that supportive communication serves not only to provide technical direction but also to help create a more comfortable experience for the client.

In addition, equality in communication between photographers and clients also plays a role in creating a more harmonious working relationship. One client stated:

"I was given the freedom to choose the concept I wanted, and the photographer was very open to my ideas" (Client 4, 2024).

This confirms that collaborative communication, where clients are given space to express ideas and participate in the creative process, can increase their level of satisfaction. In this case, social exchange theory plays a role in explaining that balanced and mutually beneficial relationships are more likely to last in the long term.

However, this study also revealed communication barriers that can hinder the effectiveness of the photographer-client relationship. Barnlund (1968) explained that interpersonal communication barriers can arise due to differences in expectations, lack of communication skills, and psychological and environmental factors. In this context, one of the main challenges found was the difference in expectations between photographers and clients, especially regarding the technical aspects of photography. One photographer said:

"Sometimes clients want something that is less realistic technically, and I have to explain it in a way that is easy to understand so that they are still satisfied with the end result" (Photographer 2, 2024).

This shows that client education through clear communication is essential to reduce misunderstandings and ensure realistic expectations.

Clients' lack of understanding of the technical aspects of photography is also an obstacle in conveying their expectations clearly. Rahayu Bella Kartika et al. (2023) emphasise that ineffective service communication can have a negative impact on customer loyalty. Therefore, photographers need to have good communication strategies, such as using simpler language or visualizing sample results, to bridge the gap in understanding.

The findings of this study are in line with Liu & Jiang (2021), which states that effective communication in service delivery can increase clients' positive perceptions of service providers, thereby contributing to long-term customer loyalty. Therefore, photographers who are able to implement good interpersonal communication are more likely to build sustainable working relationships with their clients.

In conclusion, effective interpersonal communication between photographers and clients plays a vital role in creating service satisfaction, building trust, and increasing client loyalty. By implementing communication based on openness, empathy, support, and equality, photographers can create a more positive service experience and maintain stronger working relationships with their clients. This finding supports research (Sze Chee & Md Husin, 2020) which confirms that good communication between service providers and clients contributes to customer satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, the results of this study also strengthen the idea (Devito & Maulana, 1997) that successful interpersonal communication consists of five main dimensions that support each other in building better professional relationships.

#### 4. Conclusion

The results of the study showed that the five dimensions of interpersonal communication – openness, empathy, supportiveness, positive attitude, and equality – play an important role in building a harmonious working relationship between photographers and clients. Openness allows photographers and clients to convey expectations more clearly, reducing misunderstandings that can impact service satisfaction. Empathy shown by photographers helps create comfort for clients, which ultimately improves their experience during the photo shoot. The supportive attitude and positive attitude of the photographer strengthen the client's trust and encourage them to be more active in expressing creative preferences. Meanwhile, equality in communication ensures that clients not only act as recipients of services but also have a voice in the creative process, which strengthens their satisfaction with the final result.

Through the analysis of Social Exchange Theory, this study found that overall, the rewards received by photographers and clients were greater than the sacrifices they made. Although there were some challenges, such as differences in expectations and lack of technical understanding from clients, the working relationship continued to run well because of open and educational communication from photographers. In the perspective of this theory, a more informative communication strategy can reduce the "cost" in social exchange, thereby increasing the benefits felt by both parties. Thus, it can be concluded that effective interpersonal communication is a key factor in creating a positive and sustainable working relationship in photography services at creative agencies.

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