



## Developing a Customer Service Communication Model to Enhance Professional Image: A Case Study of Early-Stage Laundry Business

Sondang Beatrix Siahaan<sup>1</sup>, Novi Handayani Simbolon<sup>2</sup>, Fatma Dwi Jati<sup>3</sup>, Khanti Listya<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Business Administration Study Program, Politeknik Negeri Medan, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup>Finance and Banking Study Program, Politeknik Negeri Medan, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup>Accounting Study Program, Politeknik Negeri Medan, Indonesia

<sup>4</sup>Public Financial Accounting Study Program, Politeknik Negeri Medan, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

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While early-stage service business often struggle with brand perception, research on standardized communication frameworks for MSME remains limited. This study develops a customer service communication model designed to bridge the gap between operational service and professional image in early-stage laundry businesses. Utilizing the systematic ADDIE (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation) framework, this research employs a comprehensive R&D (research and development) approach to ensure the model is both theoretically sound and practically viable. Grounded in the Osgood-Schramm circular communication theory, this research adopts a qualitative developmental approach. Through semi-structured interviews, field observation, and data triangulation, this study identifies critical touchpoints in the service communication cycle. The result is a synchronized communication flow and a standardized pocketbook guide tailored for three pivotal interactions: customer drop-off, pick-up, and complaint handling. Beyond its practical utility, this research contributes to service communication literature by operationalizing theoretical models into actionable frameworks for informal business sectors. The findings demonstrate that a structured developmental approach to interpersonal communication serves as a vital catalyst for enhancing service quality and fostering long-term business resilience.

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*Corresponding Author:*

Sondang Beatrix Siahaan,  
Administrasi Bisnis,  
Politeknik Negeri Medan,  
Jalan Almamater No. 1 Kampus USU, Medan, Sumatera Utara, 20155, Indonesia.  
Email: [sondangsiahaan@polmed.ac.id](mailto:sondangsiahaan@polmed.ac.id)

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

In line with the demands of a fast-paced lifestyle, the laundry service sector has experienced rapid growth. This growth is not limited to large cities but also extends to suburban areas and districts. This rapid growth is naturally accompanied by intense competition. This often traps aspiring entrepreneurs in a "price war" to compete with

rivals, while neglecting a fundamental aspect key to long-term competitiveness: a professional image. For a new business, a professional first impression is crucial, as there is no established track record to rely on.

A crucial problem that often occurs in laundry businesses in the early stages of operation is the lack of structured customer service communication standards from the outset. Communication is often reactive, inconsistent, and poorly planned, especially when addressing detailed customer questions or complaints. This failure to communicate professionally directly hinders the development of a trustworthy and reliable image, making new laundry businesses vulnerable to losing initial customers and hindering growth. Another problem lies in the skills gap in the human resources sector. Often, recruited workers lack the necessary educational background or work experience to interact and communicate professionally with customers. On the other hand, business owners themselves generally have limited time and expertise to conduct specialized training in customer communication. As a result, new-employee training tends to focus solely on the technical aspects of the job—such as operating laundry equipment like washing machines and dryers—while neglecting the development of crucial soft skills, such as service etiquette and effective customer complaint handling. This problem is compounded by the operational reality that startups lack the financial capacity to hire specialized staff. As a result, a single employee is often burdened with multifaceted responsibilities spanning the entire workflow, from internal production processes to serving as the sole point of direct contact with customers, which demands both technical and communication skills.

This situation creates a gap between business demands for a professional image and the capabilities of existing human resources. To bridge this gap, this study proposes developing a customer service communication model as a structured, practical foundation for start-up entrepreneurs, serving as a guide for early-stage laundry businesses in building a professional image and sustainable competitive advantage.

Based on the background explained, the problem this research seeks to address is how the customer service communication model can serve as a practical guide for building a professional image in the initial stages of laundry. The scope of this research is limited to the development of a customer service communication model with partners as research subjects (case studies), which are early-stage laundry businesses.

The Resource-Based View (RBV) theory was developed in response to strategic approaches that focused too much on the company's external environment. This theory was first pioneered by Wernerfelt (1984). This theory holds that a company's sustainable competitive advantage does not stem from its ability to position itself in the external market, but rather from the possession and utilization of unique internal resources and capabilities. According to the RBV, to become a source of long-term advantage, these resources or capabilities must meet the criteria of being valuable, rare, inimitable, and fully supported by the organizational structure.

The RBV emphasizes strategic choices, the optimization of human resources, and the identification, development, and utilization of key resources to maximize firm value (Dasuki, 2021). In this research, the RBV offers a powerful lens for analyzing the challenges faced by early-stage laundry businesses. In early-stage laundry businesses, physical assets such as washing machines or strategic locations are easily copied by competitors and therefore cannot become a source of sustainable advantage. Therefore, the strategic focus must shift to developing intangible and difficult-to-imitate internal capabilities. This research positions the ability to communicate professionally with customers as a potential core capability. This capability has proven valuable because it can build image and trust, which are rare because they are often overlooked by similar competitors and difficult to imitate, as they involve a service culture and interpersonal skills that take time to develop. Therefore, the customer service communication model

developed in this research is not merely an operational guide, but a strategic tool for shaping and standardizing this core capability from day one of the business's operations.

Communication is a strategic instrument for building relationships, modeled through various frameworks, linear, interactional, or transactional to illustrate the flow of information and resolve bottlenecks (Mulyana, 2022; Mukarom, 2020). In customer service, these models ensure service quality across dimensions like reliability and responsiveness, which are proven to significantly impact corporate image (Tjiptono, 2020; Asnawi, 2017).

Customer service communication is a specific application of communication science that focuses on interactions between companies and their customers. According to Tjiptono (2020), this communication is an integral part of service delivery, aiming to create a positive customer experience. The importance of this communication aspect is demonstrated in research by Santosa & Luthfiyyah (2020), who found a positive, significant relationship between marketing communication and customer loyalty. Interpersonal communication can resolve service complaints and positively impact a company's image (AB et al., 2022). Simultaneously the body language communication variable, product quality and service quality have a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty (Siregar et al., 2025). Interpersonal communication effectively builds emotional closeness, creates comfort, and increases repurchase intensity (Putri et al., 2025) and improving service quality will increase customer repeat purchases (Ambarwati & Setiorini, 2020).

The causal relationship between service quality and corporate image formation has been empirically proven, specifically in the laundry service industry. Research by Prasetya (2021) found that service quality positively and significantly influences corporate image, and, according to Seke et al. (2023), corporate image is not a driver of customer satisfaction. This study proposes a more specific concept: professional image. This concept is defined as the customer's perception that a business has high standards of competence, reliability, and integrity. This image is built not from a single large campaign, but from the accumulation of consistent, small interactions. Therefore, it can be concluded that the current understanding in this field is that the image (both brand and company) is not built solely through advertising, but through direct experience and consistent, high-quality service communication. The model developed in this study aims to standardize these interactions.

Various studies have examined service innovation in the laundry industry, primarily focusing on technological interventions. Research has implemented QRIS payments, Google Maps, and WhatsApp Business (Cuandra & Angesty, 2024), Android-based management systems (Hidayat et al. (2023), and specialized applications for order and booking (Fernanda et al., 2019; Rumaisa et al., 2024; Paramita & Pernando, 2023). While these studies confirm that application development is a key strategy for improving operational efficiency, they predominantly address the technical and digital infrastructure of the business.

However, a significant research gap remains regarding the non-technological, human-centric strategic foundations of early-stage laundry business. While existing literature heavily explores digital tools and transaction automation, there is a lack of structured models specifically addressing how professional communication can be standardized as a core internal capability from day one. This research fills this gap by shifting the focus from technological solutions to a conceptual-communicative model. Unlike previous studies that prioritize "what" tools to use, this study addresses "how" a startup with limited resources can build a professional image through a structured customer service communication model to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage.

Based on this background, this research seeks to develop a customer service communication model that serves as a practical guide for building a professional image in the initial stages of a laundry business.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a research and development (R&D) approach, focusing on developing a product. The ADDIE model, which stands for Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate, serves as the R&D framework for this research. Each stage of the ADDIE model is interconnected. Although evaluation is the final stage, it is also applied to assess each preceding phase, including analysis, design, development, and implementation (Waruwu, 2024).

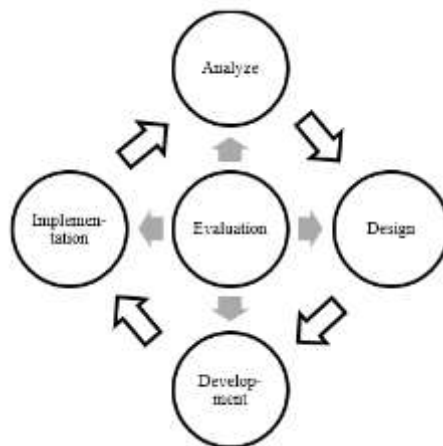


Figure 1. ADDIE Model Research

The case study for this research is SBS Laundry, a start-up laundry business operating in Samosir Regency, North Sumatra Province. SBS Laundry is a start-up business that has been operating for only a few months and currently employs only one employee. SBS Laundry was selected as a case study because it was deemed representative and ideal. The business had operated for less than a month and had a single employee. This employee managed all technical production tasks while also acting as the frontline of customer service. The owner, a new entrepreneur, naturally prioritized basic operations. These conditions created a "laboratory" for observing communication gaps and testing new models early.

Data collection in the field is of course related to data mining techniques, and it is also related to data sources and types, at least data sources in qualitative research are in the form of: (1) words and (2) actions, the rest is additional data such as documents or written data sources, photos and statistics (Rijali, 2019). The research process begins with Problem and Context Analysis, where the difficulties faced by SBS Laundry in operating their business are identified. This is followed by a User Needs Analysis to determine the necessary solutions, which are proposed in the form of a communication model and a handbook. Subsequently, the researcher conducts a Literature Study, reviewing relevant theories, concepts, and prior research to support the proposed solution. Based on this study and the needs analysis, an Initial Product Formulation is established, outlining specific objectives and an initial concept for the communication model and handbook. The next step is Product Design Development, where the initial solution is elaborated into a detailed design. Before implementation, the product undergoes Expert Validation (Feasibility Test) by Service and Communication Academics. If the communication model and handbook meet the criteria, they proceed to the Implementation phase at SBS Laundry; otherwise, they must be revised and re-validated. Finally, the research concludes with Research Reporting, which involves systematically compiling the findings and describing the product's implementation aimed at enhancing the professional image of the SBS Laundry business.

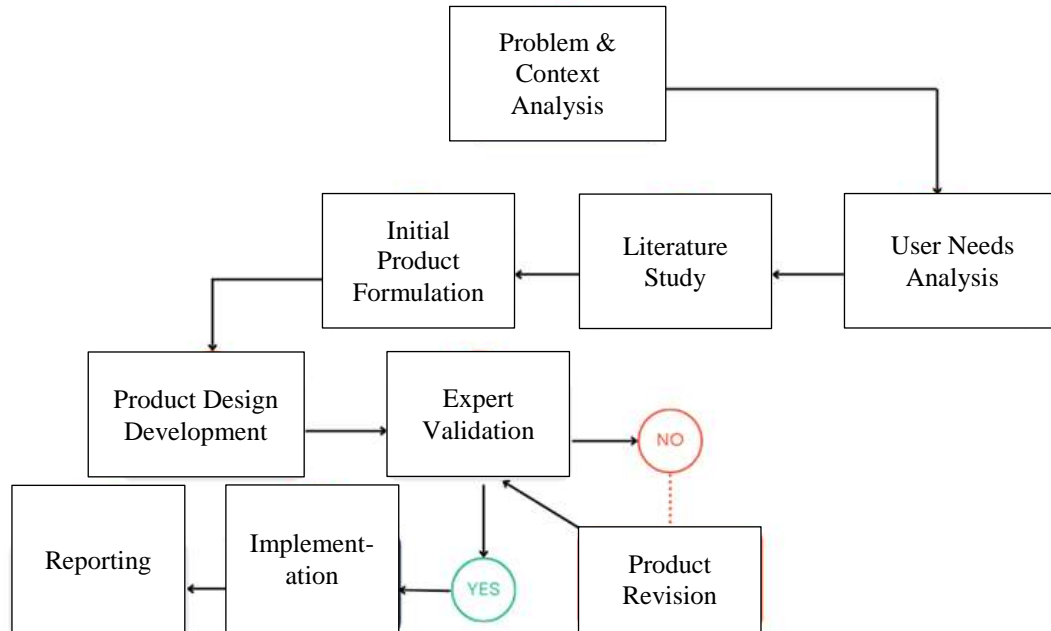


Figure 2. Research Flow Chart

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The development carried out is the result of applying the development steps of the ADDIE model with the stages (1) Analysis, (2) Design, (3) Development, (4) Implementation, and (5) Evaluation.

#### 3.1 Analysis

The analysis phase was conducted to identify problems, needs, and the operational context in the field as a basis for model development. The qualitative data collected from field interviews and direct observations at SBS Laundry were analyzed using a systematic thematic approach. This process followed the interactive model of data analysis, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researchers transcribed the interviews with the owner and staff, then identified key patterns regarding current communication habits and perceived service gaps. Observation notes regarding employee interactions with customers were also coded to identify recurring behavioral themes.

SBS Laundry is a laundry business in its pioneering phase (early stages). It had only been operating for four months at the time of the research. Its location in a rural area is a crucial context influencing customer characteristics and market penetration strategies. As a new business, the primary focus is on service introduction and building a foundation of trust within the local community. Operationally, the business remains relatively small. Interview data indicates that the average number of customers per month ranges from 15 to 20. This results in a monthly revenue of between Rp 1 million and Rp 1.5 million. In terms of human resources, the business employs one employee from the surrounding area. This employee has a high school education and no prior formal work experience in the laundry service industry. This situation presents a unique challenge in implementing professional service standards.

Professionalism in this business context is not defined as a grand venue, but rather focuses on attitude and quality of service. The owner defines professional service as behavior that includes friendliness, politeness, and punctuality. Another crucial aspect is the implementation of information transparency, particularly regarding pricing and estimated completion times. Professionalism is also defined as a readiness to actively listen to and respond to customer needs, as well as the ability to consistently maintain the quality of laundry results.

Field findings indicate that the laundry business currently lacks formal written Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), particularly for customer service communication guidelines. The owner acknowledged this is a consequence of the business's small scale and early operation.

Nevertheless, basic guidelines have been established verbally. These informal guidelines cover essential instructions, such as the obligation to greet customers, how to confirm orders, the importance of accurately writing down garment details, and the need to provide clear completion time estimates. Service price, washing quality, speed of service, strategic location, as well as promotions and discounts provided are important factors in determining the choice of laundry service, including aspects of comfort and trust in the safety of clothes (Arifa et al., 2025).

The employee training process for customer service remains entirely dependent on the owner. The methods used are hands-on training and mentoring. New employees first observe the owner's customer service, before gradually attempting to handle customers themselves under supervision. The primary emphasis in this informal training is on internalizing polite speech, thoroughness in the order-taking process, and accuracy in recording special customer requests.

Based on interviews, several frequently occurring and crucial touchpoints were identified. The main points of interaction occur when customers hand over their laundry (order acceptance) and when they pick up their laundry (pickup).

At the receiving stage, staff are required to actively listen to customers' specific requests and provide clear explanations regarding pricing and processing times. At the pick-up stage, the focus of communication is on ensuring the results match the order and confirming customer satisfaction. In addition to face-to-face interactions, communication is also occasionally conducted via messaging apps (WhatsApp) when customers contact in advance to confirm completion times or schedule pick-up. This is handled directly by the owner. WhatsApp can be used as a communication tool for receiving orders, confirming laundry status, promoting services, and handling complaints (Yoeliastuti & Faridah, 2025).

So far, the business hasn't received any major complaints regarding communication, which can be attributed to its relatively low customer volume. However, the owner has received some significant feedback indicating a service gap. Customers are known to expect more proactive updates on the status of their laundry from the laundry. Furthermore, customers also want reminders (notifications) when their laundry is finished and ready for pickup. This finding is crucial. It indicates a shift in customer expectations from reactive service (waiting to be contacted or inquired) to proactive service (being actively informed). This gap between current practices and customer expectations underscores the urgency of developing a more structured and professional service communication model for this laundry business.

Table 1. Summary of Analysis Findings

No.	Analysis Category	Key Findings
1.	Business Profile	A pioneering laundry startup in a rural area, operating for four months with a small customer base of 15 to 20 clients per month
2.	Human Resources	Employs one local staff member with a high school education and no prior formal experience in the laundry service industry
3.	Service Standards	Lack of formal written Standard Operating Procedures; communication relies on informal verbal instructions and hands on

	mentoring by the owner
4. The Idea of Professionalism	Defined by the owner as a combination of polite attitude, punctuality, price transparency, and consistent laundry quality
5. Key Touchpoints	Primary interactions occur during order acceptance (drop off) and pickup, with occasional digital communication via WhatsApp

### 3.2 Design

From the observations, the interpersonal communication process between laundry employees and customers uses a two-way communication process. Where customers respond to messages given by employees, and vice versa. From the literature study conducted, the communication model applied by employees and customers is an interactional communication model. The interactional communication model was introduced by Wilbur Schramm in 1954. This communication model describes a two-way communication process. The sender and recipient of the message can switch roles in sending and receiving messages. In this case, the employee plays the role of the message sender and the customer plays the role of the message receiver. Likewise, they can switch roles in the communication process.

In-depth interviews with the business owner identified a clear vision for the desired image. The goal is to establish an image of "simple yet professional, clean, and trustworthy." The owner clearly differentiates professionalism from luxurious facilities.



Figure 3. Interactional Communication Model for Laundry Business

Based on the findings from the analysis phase, a draft communication model was developed. The initial design (first draft) focused on addressing the flow of normal situations, encompassing two main sections: communication during customer drop-off and communication during customer pick-up. Within these two main sections, an interactive communication flow between employees and customers was designed, as well as communication guidelines for each "message" sent or communication stage undertaken. All of this was packaged in a draft pocket book. The developed model is visualized through a structured communication flow diagram that serves as a practical guide for staff during customer interactions. This flow standardizes every touchpoint, from the initial greeting and order receipt to the final pickup process. By following this diagram, staff can maintain consistency in their communication, ensuring that professional service standards are met regardless of their prior experience. The diagram highlights critical decision points, such as identifying specific garment requirements and confirming delivery timelines, which are essential for building trust and a professional image. This visual representation allows startup owners to easily train new employees on the strategic aspects of customer service beyond technical laundry operations.



Figure 4. Employee and Customer Communication Flow during the Customer Drop off Process

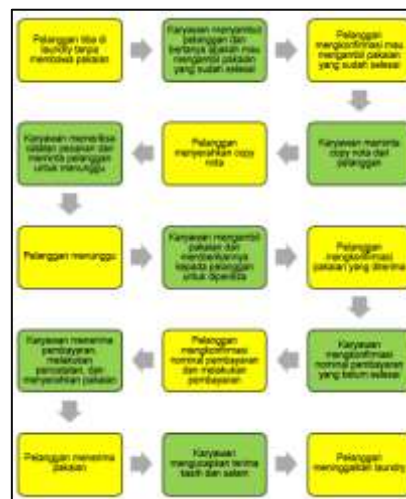


Figure 5. Employee and Customer Communication Flow during the Customer Pick Up Process

### 3.3 Development

This stage focuses on the design validation process by experts and product revisions based on the input received. The developed customer service communication model underwent a formal validation process involving two experts. The first validator is a senior lecturer specializing in Service Excellence, selected for their expertise in service quality standards and customer satisfaction strategies. The second validator is a lecturer and entrepreneurship practitioner, chosen to ensure the model's practical viability and alignment with real-world business operations. The validation was conducted using a structured assessment instrument covering two main parameters: content feasibility and implementation feasibility. Content feasibility was evaluated based on conceptual accuracy, material relevance to professional image building, substance completeness across customer touchpoints, and linguistic clarity. Meanwhile, implementation feasibility focused on the practicality of the communication flow, ease of adoption by staff, alignment with existing resources, and consistency with the business's vision and mission.

Expert validation was conducted using a structured evaluation form to ensure a systematic assessment of the model. The validators provided their assessments through a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 represented the lowest score and 5 represented the highest score for each indicator. The results of quantitative validation through questionnaires showed that the draft pocketbook obtained a score of 4.38 out of 5 for the parameter of content feasibility and a score of 4.75 for the parameter of implementation feasibility. In addition, the validators also provided crucial qualitative input for product improvement. The most significant primary qualitative input was the need to add specific guidelines for handling customer complaints, which were not included in the initial draft. This qualitative input from the validators was followed up by the researchers through significant revisions, specifically by adding a new section to the draft pocket book: the complaint handling communication guide. When a customer reports a service failure, such as a persistent stain on a garment, the staff is trained to follow a structured three step response: empathy, explanation, and solution. Instead of giving a defensive or reactive response, the staff uses a standardized script: "We sincerely apologize for the inconvenience, [Customer Name]. We strive for excellence, but it appears we missed this specific area. May we offer to re process this item immediately at no additional cost to ensure it meets our quality standards?" This scenario demonstrates how professional communication can transform a potentially negative experience into an opportunity to reinforce a reliable and professional image, even when operational errors occur.

This study aims to develop a customer service communication model for a start-up laundry business still in the pioneering phase, using the ADDIE development model approach. Based on the research findings presented, the following discussion outlines the relationship between field findings, the communication theory used, and the practical implications of implementing the developed communication model.

During the analysis, it was found that the conditions of the SBS Laundry business reflect the general characteristics of newly established micro-businesses: limited human resources, undocumented work procedures, and an informal service communication system. In the context of service communication, these limitations impact the consistency of message delivery to customers. Although the owner has established verbal guidelines regarding friendly behavior and honest information delivery, the lack of written communication SOPs creates the potential for differences in communication styles between individuals. This aligns with the organizational communication theory proposed by Pace and Faules (2005), which states that undocumented communication standards risk message distortion and service inconsistencies.

The situation analysis reveals that the business's primary focus remains on gaining customer trust and establishing a professional image. In this context, professionalism is not defined as luxurious facilities, but rather as polite, transparent, and consistent communication. This understanding demonstrates the owner's awareness of the importance of communication as a means of building customer trust and loyalty.

Next, during the design phase, the Osgood-Schramm interactional communication model served as the primary basis for development. This model is considered the most relevant because it depicts the dynamic two-way communication process between employees and customers. In practice, interactions between customers and laundry employees are not one-way; both parties actively exchange messages, both verbally and nonverbally. This two-way communication allows for direct feedback, which plays a crucial role in reducing misunderstandings. Applying the principles of the interactional model also aligns with the needs of small businesses that prioritize personal relationships and closeness with customers.

The communication model design then focused on two key touchpoints: drop-off and pick-up. These two stages were chosen because they are the most crucial moments in shaping customer perceptions of service quality. At the receiving stage, employees are

required to actively listen, carefully record order details, and provide clear explanations of pricing and turnaround times. At the delivery stage, the focus of communication is on ensuring customer satisfaction and creating a positive impression that can encourage repeat use. These two touchpoints align with the moment of truth theory in service management, which states that every direct interaction with a customer is a crucial opportunity to strengthen or weaken a company's image.

The development phase demonstrated that the draft communication pocketbook received a positive response from the validators. High scores for content feasibility and implementation indicated that the model's substance aligns with the basic principles of good service communication. However, feedback regarding the need for customer complaint handling guidelines was a significant finding. Customer complaints are an aspect often overlooked by micro-businesses, even though, according to Kotler (2009), effective complaint handling can be an effective means of increasing customer loyalty. Therefore, the revision, which included complaint communication guidelines, was a significant step in product improvement. This addition not only broadened the scope of the communication model but also demonstrated the business's readiness to face future service dynamics. Customer complaint handling is an example of communication between a business organization and customers, whether it is criticism, input, suggestions, or complaints felt by customers (Situmeang, 2023).

During the implementation and evaluation phase, the results of a one-week trial of the pocketbook demonstrated a positive impact on employee communication behavior. This duration was selected as an initial pilot test to evaluate the immediate adoption of standardized scripts by staff and to observe real time customer reactions during the most frequent touchpoints. This timeframe allowed for the identification of primary operational bottlenecks and linguistic barriers in the communication flow without overwhelming the startups limited resources. A one week period is considered sufficient for a preliminary feasibility study in a small scale business context with low customer volume, ensuring that the qualitative feedback gathered represents the typical daily interactions of the business. During this time, employees were able to remember and apply key points in interacting with customers, such as greeting them politely, providing clear information, and ensuring customers understand estimated turnaround times. This demonstrates that a simple yet structured communication guide can help improve service quality, even in businesses with limited resources. Furthermore, the owner observed increased employee confidence in interactions, a positive indicator of the model's effectiveness.

Overall, the developed communication model serves not only as a practical guide but also as a learning tool and service quality control tool. Through this written guide, laundry businesses gain a solid foundation for building a professional and consistent communication culture. Furthermore, this research confirms that communication is a strategic factor in small business development, particularly in the early stages when reputation and customer trust are being built. Thus, the development of an interaction-based customer service communication model at SBS Laundry has proven relevant and beneficial. This model can serve as a reference for similar businesses in designing efficient and easy-to-implement communication strategies.

Beyond its practical application as a service guide, this research provides significant theoretical contributions by expanding the application of the Resource Based View (RBV) within the context of small scale service startups. While RBV traditionally focuses on established organizational assets, this study demonstrates that standardized communication models can function as an intangible core capability that is valuable, rare, and difficult to imitate for early stage businesses. Furthermore, this research enriches the field of organizational communication by synthesizing linear and interactional communication theories into a practical framework specifically designed for human resource constraints in rural business environments. By formalizing informal verbal instructions into a structured model, this study offers a new theoretical

perspective on how small businesses can strategically build a professional image and sustainable competitive advantage through disciplined interpersonal communication standards from their inception.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study extends the application of the Osgood-Schramm model by demonstrating its adaptability within the informal economic sector. While traditional communication theories often focus on large-scale corporate structures, this research highlights how the circularity of encoding and decoding is vital for micro-businesses where feedback loops are immediate and highly personal. By framing the ADDIE approach as a bridge between theoretical communication design and practical MSME operations, the study contributes to the discourse on "micro-communication logistics," proving that structured interpersonal exchange is a measurable asset rather than an abstract soft skill.

This study produced a customer service communication model for a start-up laundry business using the ADDIE model development approach. The results showed that the developed model was relevant and effective in helping improve the quality of communication between employees and customers. During the analysis phase, it was discovered that the business still operates on a small scale with unstandardized service communication. This raises the need for clear and easy-to-implement communication guidelines. The design phase resulted in a model based on Osgood-Schramm interactional communication, which describes the two-way communication process and is appropriate for the characteristics of micro-businesses. Validation by experts showed that the resulting communication guidebook had a high level of feasibility in terms of both content and application. Field implementation demonstrated that the use of this guide improved employee communication skills, clarified the flow of information delivery, and strengthened the business's professional image. Overall, the developed communication model proved to be a practical reference in building more structured, polite, and trustworthy customer service. For other service-based MSMEs, it is recommended to adopt these communication guidelines that allow staff to reference standardized scripts and protocols instantly during customer interactions.

This research acknowledges several limitations. First, the development of the communication model was conducted with a limited number of partners, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to different geographical areas or larger laundry franchises. Second, this study primarily focuses on interpersonal verbal and non verbal communication, without extensively exploring digital communication channels. Future research could expand on these findings by testing the communication model across a broader range of service industries to validate its cross sector applicability. Furthermore, there is a significant opportunity to integrate artificial intelligence or automated messaging systems into the model to meet the growing customer demand for proactive and real time service updates.

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