

The Role of AI in Enhancing Business Communication: A Review of Students' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

Even after more than two decades, Dr. Bill McPherson's study on Student Perceptions About Business Communication in Their Careers is still relevant today, if not more so with the ever-increasing speed of technological advancements in communication. A simple online job search would nearly always yield excellent communication skills as one of the listed requirements for an employment position. Federal, state, or private sector employers expect applicants to possess written, verbal, and interpersonal communication skills. The perception of current and former students at a regional university of the frequency of use and need of business communication in their careers is investigated, whether past and current university curriculum provide adequate opportunities for students to study Business Communication. The introduction of AI into the communication landscape is portrayed as a transformative force, with a survey of instructors anticipating AI writing tools' integration into professional settings. This shift necessitates a rethink in teaching methodologies, balancing the benefits of increased efficiency and creativity with the risks of diminished critical thinking and originality. The survey results provide valuable insights into students' current engagement with AI tools, their satisfaction levels, comfort with sharing personal information, and the anticipated role of AI in education and future employment. These findings highlight the perceptions among students regarding the integration of AI technologies like ChatGPT into their academic and professional lives, underscoring the need for a balanced approach that leverages the benefits of AI while addressing ethical concerns and maintaining the value of traditional educational paradigms.

Keywords: AI, business, corporate, communication, career, customers, perceptions, students

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INTRODUCTION

Corporate communication is an essential component of everyday life, especially when business deals must be negotiated, and employees must be managed (Balmer, 2017). Evidence suggests that effective business communication can create value for corporations when dealing with operations and strategy (Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017) and business communication is a foundational force when it comes to organizational issues and conflict management (Groddeck, 2011). Although business communication is either a required or at least recommended course at most institutions of higher education, the perception of students of the importance of this subject often varies significantly from reality. Students might believe that business communication is of secondary importance and that their communication skills are adequate. The opposite seems to be true of employers seeking graduates with excellent communication skills, as demonstrated by most employment ads (Kleckner & Butz, 2022). This is especially true in a global business environment when students will often be required to communicate with suppliers in foreign countries (Lee, 2021) and must be sensitive to differing communication styles and standards (Shrivastava, 2020). Whether writing many short emails a day or drafting a 100-page feasibility report, students will be required to communicate with colleagues, customers, and other business stakeholders (Vukovic, Urosevic, & Radosavljevic, 2021). Outstanding verbal and written communication skills may also be the deciding factor in whether they secure a promotion since the interview is often the primary deciding factor between two equally educated and skilled candidates.

The introduction of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly AI-powered writing tools like ChatGPT, is poised to revolutionize business communication, raising questions about the future role of traditional communication courses (Kim, 2023). Among the use of writing instruments, AI tools are often used in business communication to facilitate the summarization of complex business reports (Naidoo & Dulek, 2022), whereas chatbots are utilized in generating email messages and online content (Gunkel, 2020, p. 136), despite some limitations and possible ethical concerns (Getchell, *et al.*, 2022) as well as concerns of disinformation and low-quality content production (Illa, Colleoni, & Zyglidopoulos, 2022). Ninety-Five students from Business Communication and International Business courses were asked about their current communication skills, anticipated use of different communication forms in their careers, and their engagement with AI tools like ChatGPT. Results indicate a strong confidence among students in their verbal communication skills, with a majority expecting to rely heavily on verbal and written forms of communication in their careers. However, there is a notable reluctance to share personal information with AI platforms, and a significant majority do not foresee the obsolescence of business communication courses due to AI advancements, which is in par with the findings of Iaia, *et al.* (2024), reporting a low usage of AI in communication. Despite artificial intelligence experiencing a surge in usage, with estimates suggesting a 56% increase over the past decade, its integration into communication tasks remains minimal. This slow adoption can be attributed to a scarcity of comprehensive research and a lack of open exchange regarding the experiences of businesses in this field, hindering the formation, spread, and solidification of knowledge in this domain. There seems to be a gap in understanding, identification, skill enhancement, and implementation of innovative solutions of AI in business communication, utilizing the framework of knowledge management (KM) (Iaia, *et al.*, 2024).

An often-overlooked aspect of business communication in the United States is the increasing workforce comprising recent graduates or employees for whom English is a Second or

Additional Language. McGann, *et al.* (2020) investigated the challenges facing Business Communication students at a private institution of secondary education while also interviewing faculty to see how these two perceptions differ. The results indicated that faculty are often unaware of international students' needs and insecurities while writing in English, resulting in these students being overworked and feeling alienated within the class environment, hindering their communication effectiveness. (McGann, *et al.*, 2020). Similarly, Khan, *et al.* (2016) studied students' perceptions of how important communication skills in English as a second language are in Saudi Arabia. Students readily recognized the importance of these skills not only as means to advance their careers but also as an essential part of personal development. The results showed that students also acknowledged the need to engage in private English communication lessons on top of their curriculum at business schools, engineering, and computer science programs (Khan, Khan, & Ahmad, 2016). Communication is essential in every discipline, even in those traditionally regarded as requiring less frequent communication, such as scientific disciplines. Undergraduate students in Australia were questioned about the level of their scientific writing and oral communication skills imperative to science in a study by Mercer-Mapstone and Matthews (2016). Students believed that communication skills are important; however, they indicated a lack of proper assessment and the opportunity to learn and practice these skills throughout their undergraduate studies (Mercer-Mapstone & Matthews, 2016). The evidence of need of communication studies even in graduate school indicates the benefits of even if one module of business communication during the semester is introduced to students (Stout, 2014). The topic of cross-cultural literacy is included in most Business Communication textbooks and materials, and therefore it is an indispensable part of communication. De Pillis, *et al.* (2015) investigated how culture can impact business communication, specifically on leadership preferences in Hawaii. When comparing two job candidates, one with Hawaiian values in their application and one that didn't, business students preferred the candidate who did not express their values during the selection process. The results indicated the importance of training against stereotyping in business communication curriculums (De Pillis, *et al.*, 2015).

McPherson's 1998 study of *Student Perceptions About Business Communication in Their Careers* sparked the idea for our study, and it was interesting to see how these perceptions have drastically changed and evolved in the past 24 years. Two separate studies were utilized, one by Oussii and Klibi (2017) and the other by Alshare, *et al.* (2011), as the foundation for the current study. Later the focus shifted to the student population of three specific disciplines of Information Systems, Accounting, and Graduate Studies to see the difference in their perception of communication skills and the importance of these skills in the workplace. In the current study, the perception of Business Communication and International Business students were analyzed to see how they assess their communication skills. Students were asked ten questions regarding their communication channels, how much they communicate in a workday, and whether they produce written documents, utilize persuasive techniques, or give presentations. Most students appeared to have quite high confidence in their communication skills and anticipate using in-person communication the most within their workplace, followed by phone and email.

The late 1990s

In the 1998 study by McPherson, students were asked which communication tasks they anticipate completing in their workday. The study was conducted over 25 years ago, and thus, certain communication channels have ceased to exist (paggers). In contrast, electronic forms of

communication have substantially expanded with numerous innovative channels (Zoom) and artificial intelligence that did not exist in 1998. Between 25 and 43 percent of students believed that they would be in weekly meetings, will utilize communication with an international aspect or audience, give speeches or oral presentations, and use multimedia communication channels or communication with fellow employees. About 37% of students believed that they would utilize videoconferencing weekly, and an astounding 99.2% of students believed that they will never use audio or teleconferencing. On the other hand, nearly 80% of students believed that they would be drafting letters daily or weekly, which has evolved into drafting emails instead of actual letters. Refuting this perception of students is a study conducted at an Australian university by Pignata, *et al.* (2015) which found that the number of emails written and received was higher in academia compared to email usage by staff; however, faculty members had inadequate email management strategies. Faculty indicated that the sheer volume of email communication negatively affected their workload (Pignata, *et al.*, 2015). Perhaps AI writing tools could mitigate this issue if personnel can be adequately trained to use such tools and to pose their writing prompts in a way that would create the desired message.

A 1992 survey by Sandwich, *et al.* found that 46% of a manager's time was spent in meetings, which corresponded with students' perceptions of meetings. On the contrary, students' perceptions of international communication were relatively low when only 40% anticipated engaging in international communication in the workplace. With the advent of technological innovations, electronic communication skills often involve oral presentations or giving speeches in an audio or video conference. Over two decades ago, students anticipated using such media only once a week or even once a month (McPherson, 1998).

Changes in perception between 2000 and 2020

Ten years after the McPherson study, a growing consensus among students and employers on the need for accounting graduates to possess a functional skillset existed. Both students and employers recognized the demand for communication, analytical, and teamwork skills, which were lacking in most university programs (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008). Alshare *et al.* (2011) explored the perceptions of communication skills among Accounting and Information Systems majors and graduate students, comparing student and faculty perspectives on the importance of these skills and their integration into the curriculum. The study found that a significant majority of both students and faculty acknowledged the inclusion of communication skills in the business curriculum, with a notable consensus on the adequacy of coverage for report writing, PowerPoint, listening, and interpersonal management skills. Complementarily, Oussii and Klibi (2016) surveyed 180 accounting students in Tunisia, highlighting a prioritization of key communication skills, such as effective listening and presentation organization, yet an acknowledged deficiency in the areas of body language and audience analysis was acknowledged. Moreover, Hill *et al.* (2014) investigated changes in students' self-assessed communication competencies before and after a managerial communication course, revealing initial confidence in oral skills over writing, with post-course improvements notably in report writing and executive summaries. Study results from 2020 by Moshiri *et al.* indicate that the widespread use of technology in business communication started to emerge, emphasizing the need to equip students with practical knowledge to be able to utilize such tools (Moshiri & Cardon, 2020). These studies collectively underscore the critical recognition and evolving self-assessment of communication skills among business students, aligned with curricular

expectations and professional preparedness. However, it was unforeseen that just two years later, ChatGPT would emerge, revolutionizing the field of business communication, among others, with artificial intelligence (Marr, 2023).

Emergence of Artificial Intelligence

The introduction of generative AI is poised to transform the realm of business communication, as evidenced by a survey of 343 instructors in the field by Cardon *et al.* Instructors anticipate that AI-powered writing tools will become commonplace in professional settings, necessitating significant alterations to teaching methodologies. The primary concerns identified involve a decline in critical thinking and originality, while the advantages are seen in increased efficiency and enhanced creativity. To thrive in future workplaces, students must cultivate AI fluency, encompassing the understanding of its application, ensuring authenticity, maintaining accountability, and exercising control over its use (Cardon *et al.*, 2023). Utilizing AI in corporate communication is also on the horizon, especially in the strategic decision-making process as a support tool or as an assessment tool to review proposals and optimizing various decision combinations (Berislav, Lacković, & Resler, 2023). Despite AI's broad application across various sectors, its integration into business communication practices and business communication courses remains on a lower level (Moshiri & Cardon, 2020). This gap is attributed to the scarcity of comprehensive studies and the limited sharing of corporate experiences with AI, hindering the development and dissemination of knowledge in this area. A bridge to this knowledge gap might be the incorporation of knowledge management (KM) principles to facilitate the adoption of AI in business communication, marking a novel approach in aligning business communication strategies with AI and KM to foster a synergistic relationship between the two (Iaia *et al.*, 2024).

Cardon *et al.* (2023) further indicate that using AI in business communication will require students to focus on new skillsets to apply their knowledge of AI, have the ability to determine the authenticity of sources, and learn to be accountable for the information they created using AI (Cardon *et al.* 2023). Perhaps a shift in business communication teaching methodology is in order, focusing on experiential learning and utilizing simulation as a more efficient tool of pedagogy (Russ & Drury-Grogan, 2013). The utilization of business simulation games as a form of pedagogy are already popular in management courses (Hernandez-Lara, Serradell-Lopez, & Fito-Bertran, 2019) and in teaching effective teamwork and communication (Ceschi, Dorofeeva, & Sartori, 2014); therefore, with advances in technology and artificial intelligence, similar approaches could be utilized in business communication courses. Instead of viewing technology as an enemy, some studies show that incorporating it purposefully into the classroom yields positive results (Gioiosa & Kinkela, 2019). Ethics should also be considered when discussing AI, especially with the advent of advanced AI models capable of generating human-like text. Ethical considerations, focusing on the potential for AI to manipulate information, produce subpar content, and interfere with direct stakeholder communication should be part of the ongoing discourse of the incorporation of AI into business communication (Illa, Colleoni, & Zyglidopoulos, 2022).

CURRENT STUDY

Instrumentation

Two surveys were used to collect the data presented in this study. The population sample included students enrolled in the in-person sections of Business Communication and International Business courses during the spring 2022 and fall 2023 semesters. These courses were included in the study because they are both junior-level courses, they are part of the core curriculum for business majors as required courses, and often students complete them within the same semester or at least within the same academic year. Furthermore, both courses are heavily utilized in the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation process where numerous assurance of learning assessments are performed and data is collected, as required for an AACSB certification. A total of 95 students participated in the spring 2022 survey, and for the fall 2023 survey, 114 students participated. The spring 2022 survey included ten questions covering students' perceptions of their current communication skills, the forms of communication and communication mediums that will be used in their future career, the percentage of time that will be spent communicating with people inside and outside of their future workplace, and the relevancy of various communication skills within their future careers. The fall 2023 survey included eight questions regarding students' use and satisfaction of AI responses, their comfort of sharing personal information with AI, the impact AI will have on Business Communication courses, and the potential use of AI in future careers. The surveys utilized a Likert scale, multiple choice, yes/no, and ranked choice responses. The Oussii and Klibi (2016) study was the inspiration for the focus of the spring 2022 survey.

Results

In the Spring 2022 survey, students were asked to describe their current communication skills using a 4-point Likert scale: Excellent, Good, Average, or Poor. They were also asked to indicate which forms of communication they would use the most in their future career. See Tables 1 and 2 (Appendix) for results.

The next section of the survey allowed students to speculate on how much time they would be communicating with people outside of their organization (Table 3) and inside their organization (Table 4) on a typical workday.

The responses shown in Tables 5-9 are yes/no pertaining to the performance of specific communication tasks as a part of their everyday employment in their future careers.

The survey's final question asked students to rank specific communication mediums based on their expected use in their future careers with "1" being the most used and "6" being the least used. The results in Table 10 show the specific mediums utilized for this ranking. Table 10 also displays the total number of rankings, the average, and the mode for each medium.

In the Fall 2023 survey, students were asked yes/no questions pertaining to their past use of AI (Tables 11-12), and Table 13 identified the frequency in which they use AI technology. The next section of the survey allowed students to describe their satisfaction with AI (Table 14) and their comfort level with sharing private information with AI platforms (Table 15).

The survey then begins to focus on students' use of AI in course curriculum (Table 16), as well as their perception on AI's impact on the future of Business Communication courses

(Table 17). Table 18 reflects the impact students believe AI will have on their future employment.

Discussion

An important component of the spring of 2022 was determining students' current perceptions regarding their communication skills. When asked to rate their current communication skills, 66% of students responded by stating that they viewed their communication skills as either "Good" or "Excellent" (Table 1).

An overwhelming majority of students, 80%, indicated that verbal communication would be the most used form of communication in their future careers (Table 2). This translates throughout the survey results, as indicated by 94% of the students believing they will be asking questions to supervisors and customers as part of their everyday future careers (Table 8). The questions relating to written communication (Tables 6 and 7) had a smaller portion of students believing those skills would be utilized daily in their future careers.

The students' perceived importance of verbal communication in their future careers was also present in Table 10 where students ranked communication mediums based on expected use in their future careers. When examining the frequency that each communication medium appeared in the students' rankings, in-person communication and communicating via telephone were the top two ranked choices. Of the 95 students surveyed, 49 of them ranked in-person communication as the most expected, and 36 of them ranked communicating via telephone as the second most expected form of communication in their future careers.

Given the generation of students surveyed and current workplace trends, their perceptions regarding the use of social media and videoconferencing in their future careers were noticeable. Past studies indicated that social media was not significantly covered within most business communication courses (Moshiri & Cardon, 2014). Nearly ten years later, as displayed in Table 10, 55% of students indicated that social media would be the least used form of communication in their future workplace; none of the other mediums had such a high frequency of agreement in the ranking than social media. Regarding videoconferencing, 69% responded by ranking this communication medium in the lower half of expected use as the fourth, fifth, or sixth most used (Table 10). Given the growing interconnectedness of the global business community and the influence of COVID on the increased use of videoconferencing platforms, this may be an underestimated ranking for this medium. These perceptions of social media and videoconferencing could be explained by the variety of majors that enroll in Business Communication and International Business courses.

Perceptions of Artificial Intelligence

In a subsequent study, 114 students in the same courses were asked in the fall semester of 2023 whether they have already utilized artificial intelligence, their usage of AI as part of their academic work, and their future outlook on the use of this novel medium of communication.

Based on the survey, 41% of respondents indicated that they have used ChatGPT or a similar AI text-generation tool, while 59% have not. 20% of respondents have utilized ChatGPT or other AI tools for academic purposes, whereas 80% have not. In daily life, 5% use AI chatbots or virtual assistants very often, 30% do so occasionally, and 65% never use them. Users rated their satisfaction with ChatGPT on a scale of 1 to 5, resulting in an average score of 2.6, with the most

common rating of 3. Only 3.8% feel very comfortable sharing personal or sensitive information with ChatGPT, 20.6% are somewhat comfortable, and 76.6% are not comfortable.

When asked about incorporating ChatGPT in education, results indicate that ChatGPT has been incorporated into the courses of only 2% of respondents, while 98% have not experienced such incorporation. 19% believe that widespread use of ChatGPT could replace the need for a Business Communication Course, but 81% do not. Looking ahead, 36% of respondents anticipate never using ChatGPT in their future employment, 52% expect to use it occasionally, and 12% foresee using it often.

Although certainly a long-term objective, revisiting these same questions in the next five and then again in ten years from the onset of this study is anticipated to see how students' perceptions change over time.

CONCLUSION

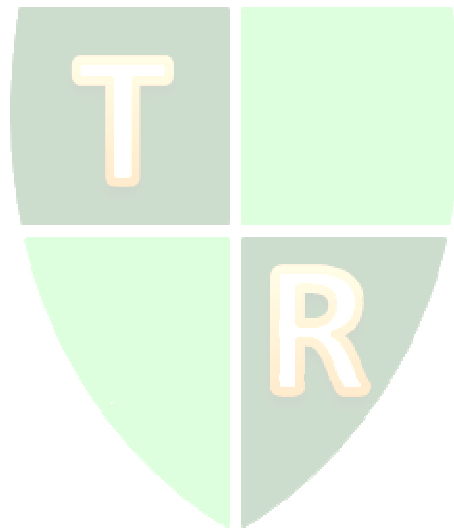
Perceptions of Business Communication have changed since the 1998 McPherson study, where 99% of survey participants indicated that they would never use audio or videoconferencing or when 10% thought that they would never have to communicate with employees (McPherson, 1998). With the advent of globalization and the continuous and rapid evolution of technology, students are often faced with new challenges when communicating in the workplace. Our study results indicate that students' perceptions are quite realistic in this area, perhaps with the exception of thinking that the vast majority of their time, they will communicate verbally and not in writing. The incorrect perception is easily refuted if one reviews the number of emails sent and received every day, with a staggering number of 319.6 billion in 2021, projected to increase to 376.4 billion by 2025 (Ceci, 2022). The second part of our study underscores the enduring value of business communication skills, even as AI begins to play a more prominent role in the workplace. The more widespread usage of AI tools, such as ChatGPT in both academic settings and the workplace makes it imperative for students to acquire adequate knowledge of such tools (González-Arias & López-García, 2023). Our study suggests that while AI can augment business communication, it cannot replace the nuanced, critical, and interpersonal skills developed through formal education. The findings advocate for the integration of AI literacy into business communication curricula, ensuring that future professionals are equipped to leverage AI effectively while maintaining the high standards of communication required in the business world. With such widespread and frequent use of written and oral communication at the workplace, institutions of higher education should consider making Business Communication part of their core curriculum (if not already done so) and incorporate communication skills training throughout the graduate and undergraduate years in other business courses as well, ensuring the active integration of artificial intelligence tools.

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APPENDIX

Table 1		
How would you rank your communication skills?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Excellent	10	11
Good	52	55
Average	31	33
Poor	2	2

Table 2		
Which form of communication do you think you will use the most in your future career?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Verbal	76	80
Written	16	17
Nonverbal	3	3

Table 3		
In your future career, what percentage of the workday do you expect to be communicating with people outside of your organization?		
Response:	Frequency	%
0-25%	14	15
26-50%	27	28
51-75%	37	39
76-100%	17	18

Table 4		
In your future career, what percentage of the workday do you expect to be communicating with people inside your organization?		
Response:	Frequency	%
0-25%	3	3
26-50%	24	25
51-75%	36	38
76-100%	31	33

Table 5		
As part of your everyday employment at work, do you think you will produce grammatically correct documents?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Yes	87	92
No	8	8

Table 6		
As part of your everyday employment at work, do you think you will organize information to create effective sentences and paragraphs?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Yes	84	88
No	11	12

Table 7		
As part of your everyday employment at work, do you think you will use persuasion in writing?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Yes	64	67
No	31	33

Table 8		
As part of your everyday employment at work, do you think you will ask questions when speaking to your supervisor/customers?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Yes	89	94
No	6	6

Table 9		
As part of your everyday employment at work, do you think you will present information to an audience?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Yes	73	79
No	19	21

Table 10										
Rank the following communication mediums/situations based on expected use in your future career. Rank 1-6 with 1 being most used and 6 being least used.										
	Ranking									
	1	2	3	4	5	6		Avg		Mode
Email	18	20	34	10	5	0		3		3
Phone	7	36	28	10	5	1		3		2
In-person	49	15	10	7	3	3		2		1
Social Media	4	4	5	10	12	52		5		6
Letter/memo	2	4	4	14	37	26		5		5
Videoconferencing	5	10	7	35	24	6		4		4

Table 11		
Have you ever used ChatGPT or a similar AI-based text generation tool before?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Yes	45	41
No	66	59

Table 12		
Have you ever used ChatGPT or other AI (Artificial Intelligence) to assist with your academic work?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Yes	22	20
No	89	80

Table 13		
How often do you use AI-powered chatbots or virtual assistants in your daily life?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Very Often	6	5
Occasionally	33	30
Never	72	65

Table 14									
If you used ChatGPT before, on a scale of 1 (Not Satisfied) to 5 (Very Satisfied), how satisfied are you with the overall quality of responses you receive from ChatGPT?									
Ranking									
1	2	3	4	5		Avg		Mode	
21	5	32	16	3		2.6		3	

Table 15		
How comfortable are you sharing personal or sensitive information with ChatGPT? (e.g., email addresses, phone numbers)		
Response:	Frequency	%
Very Comfortable	3	3.8
Somewhat Comfortable	22	20.6
Not Comfortable	82	76.6

Table 16		
Has any of your college courses incorporated ChatGPT?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Yes	2	2
No	109	98

Table 17		
Do you think the widespread use of ChatGPT in the future could replace the need for a Business Communication Course?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Yes	21	19
No	90	81

Table 18		
How often do you think you will use ChatGPT in your future place of employment?		
Response:	Frequency	%
Never	41	36
Occasionally	59	52
Often	14	12

Totals

	1	2	3	4	5	Total Responses
Q1	45	66				111
Q2	22	89				111
Q3	6	33	72			111
Q4	21	5	32	16	3	80
Q5	3	22	82			107
Q6	2	109				111
Q7	21	90				111
Q8	41	59	14			114