Specific Skills in Modern Online Negotiations: A Word Cloud and Content Analysis

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Abstract

Technology plays a key role in improving negotiation outcomes, one of the nowadays key aspects in the negotiation process being the ability to communicate effectively in the online environment. Negotiating in the digital age requires adapting traditional techniques to the new challenges and opportunities offered by technology. The research investigates the skills that Romanian companies' representatives consider relevant in conducting online negotiations, while providing a solid basis for understanding and developing essential competencies in the context of online negotiations. An unstructured interview guide was developed, which was randomly applied to representatives of various Romanian companies that conducted online business negotiations during the recent health pandemic. By means of keyword occurrence frequency different word clouds were computed, as well as the Chi-Square analysis of critical skills that contribute to effective negotiation, in order to provide a basis for developing individual competencies in online business negotiations. In the analysis of negotiation skills, the frequency with which certain skills are mentioned and their impact in the context of online negotiation was examined. Skills such as effective communication, active listening and empathy were identified as essential for success in online negotiation, reflecting the importance of authentic interaction and mutual understanding. The novelty of this research lies in the fact that it addresses an issue that has hardly been analysed in international literature: the specific skills that entrepreneurs must possess in performing, managing and/or conducting successful online business negotiations. The use of digital tools and advanced technology can help increase efficiency and accuracy in the negotiation process. The use of artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies is expected to become increasingly widespread and contribute to improving negotiation outcomes.

Keywords

Negotiation, skills, word cloud, interview, Romania, online business negotiations, qualitative analysis.

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Introduction

In contemporary society, characterized by increasingly frequent turbulence, conflicts and restrictions, respectively by periods of uncertainty and movement restrictions (see the recent global health pandemic), conducting business negotiations under appropriate conditions is becoming increasingly important, as it allows companies/parties involved to continue their activities and, above all, to ensure access, firstly to the resources and raw materials necessary for the development of value-creating processes, and secondly to the different markets.

Regardless of the partner with whom one negotiates (supplier of raw materials, distributor of finished products, the one who finances the business or other interested parties), business negotiation is based on

certain characteristics and limitations, while entailing various advantages. Among the benefits of face-to-face negotiation, we mention the following: it ensures the possibility of resolving conflicts and finding common solutions, being beneficial to all parties involved, to any problem of an economic nature, and not only (Churchman, 2019). Physical face-to-face negotiations also have the chance to generate new ideas, increasing interest in various aspects that were not considered before the negotiation began (Glade et al., 2025), as it also improves communication between all parties involved (Adinda, Barkah and Novel, 2022). Such negotiations prevent the risk of conflict escalation if diplomacy is used effectively and beneficially for all parties (Akindoyin, 2024) and it builds and preserve good relationships while giving room for creativity and innovation, even if it is time consuming (Gonzalez, 2021). Classical negotiations are a key of value creation which involves multiple issues (Trötschel et al., 2022) as it helps all involved parties to improve their skills and knowledge, such as communication, persuasion, problem-solving, critical thinking, emotional intelligence, etc. and to maximize profitability and build respect between negotiators (Wu, Wang and Li., 2024).

Negotiation is a business activity that can be conducted only through communication. The communication process is one of the key success factors of negotiation. To be beneficial for each party involved, participants in business negotiations must have good communication skills in order to increase the effectiveness of professional skills while establishing business contacts (Maksymets and Adamovych, 2021). In today's technologically advanced society, the communication skills used in negotiation must be adapted to the requirements of the negotiation process in the online environment. Digital negotiations have become an effective way to achieve favourable results in the contemporary business world (Plekhanov, Franke and Netland, 2023). The ability to master the art of digital negotiation is imperative to succeed in an ever-changing environment. This change brought with it a number of new advantages and opportunities. One of the greatest benefits brought by digitalization is global accessibility, because it allows the use of advanced tools such as artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the negotiation process (Javaid et al., 2024). One of the major advantages of using AI in digital negotiations is its ability to process and analyse large amounts of information in a very short time. This allows negotiators to make informed decisions and respond quickly to negotiation dynamics. AI can also help identify and avoid common negotiation mistakes, such as giving in to pressure or making decisions based on emotions (Papagiannidis et al., 2023). Another advantage is that there are a number of digital tools that can be used to support effective digital negotiations. One essential tool is data analytics software which allows negotiators to analyse and interpret data relevant to negotiations, providing them with valuable information and insights in real time. There are also specialized digital tools for simulation and modelling of negotiations, which can help prepare and train negotiators for different scenarios (Georgiadou, Angelopoulos and Drake, 2020).

Although at first glance there seem to be no significant differences between classic, traditional, face-to-face negotiations versus online negotiations, it is clear that online negotiation has particularities compared to traditional negotiation, particularities that come precisely from the way communication takes place, respectively from the used communication instrument: the computer (Lipp and Mohnen, 2024). Conducting online negotiations requires certain specific skills, competencies that do not only refer to communication skills in the online environment, but also to broad knowledge in the IT environment (Eklund and Isotalus, 2024).

Aware of the lack of good practices in conducting online business negotiations, the authors set out to investigate the skills that Romanian companies' representatives consider relevant in conducting online negotiations. Therefore, this research aims at highlighting by means of keyword frequency occurrence, word clouds, and Chi-Square analysis critical skills that contribute to effective negotiation and to provide a basis for developing individual competencies in online business negotiations. To implement the research scope, an unstructured interview guide was developed, which was randomly applied to representatives of various Romanian companies that conducted online business negotiations during the recent health pandemic. 34 representatives of Romanian companies participated in the interview, responses being electronically and/or audio recorded and afterwards transcribed.

The collected data was analysed using Python, with specialized libraries such as NLTK for natural language processing and Word Cloud for data visualization. Text processing included tokenization, removal of stop words, and data normalization by converting the text to a uniform format (lowercase). Keyword frequencies were analysed to identify main themes, and word clouds were generated to visualize these themes. In addition, Chi-Square analysis was used to highlight relationships and patterns between the identified critical skills. This combination of qualitative methodologies and Python-based analysis allowed for the highlighting of essential skills such as effective communication, active listening, and empathy, providing a solid foundation for developing the necessary online businesses.

The novelty of this research lies in the fact that it addresses an issue that has hardly been analysed in international literature: the specific skills that entrepreneurs must possess in performing, managing and/or conducting successful online business negotiations. The starting point in this research is the reality that negotiating in the digital age requires adapting traditional techniques to the new challenges and opportunities offered by technology. The reminder of the paper is structured as follows. The introduction section is followed by the literature review. The third part of the paper consist in the research methodology followed by the discussion and conclusions section.

1. Literature review

The world we live in today is continuously subject to numerous transformations in all fields of activity. With the evolution of technology, with the increase in digitalization but also with the increasing trend of population's demand regarding the quality of the goods and services, the business environment has also undergone changes. In this context, managers strive to adapt to new requirements and consequently adjust their business strategies so that they best correspond to the current economic situation. The negotiation process in business has evolved and continues to evolve, adapting to new commercial practices. Negotiation is an essential skill in business and everyday life (Clay-Williams et al., 2018). Whether it is closing a business partnership or the purchasing of a product, the success of an entire business activity can depend on the ability to reach a favourable agreement. This is just one of the reasons why modern negotiation are adopting more and more data-driven strategies as a result of the changes in the way negotiations are conducted, the enormous amount of data used nowadays in the business sector being the key to a powerful negotiation (Dash and Agarwal, 2016).

Managers need a lot of negotiation skills to be able to identify the best practices and negotiation tools. But they cannot forget that negotiation is driven by statistics and communication. Furthermore, modern technology allows the access of a large amount of data in a short time, especially with the help of the online environment (Yu, Bekerian and Osback, 2024). In this way, it is found that an effective negotiation requires much more than simply presenting the requirements and expectations of the people involved in this process. A successful negotiation involves preparation, a clear understanding of the context and the use of advanced techniques (Adinda, Barkah and Novel, 2022). That is why it is necessary for negotiators to know not only the people they are going to negotiate with, but to identify the key variables of the negotiation process (price, time, deadlines, etc.), the used advanced negotiation techniques (for example, Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement - BATNA, Questioning Technique - SPIN, Anchoring Technique, etc.). Therefore, not only data driven negotiation was born, but, furthermore, the practice of negotiation has also expanded into the online environment, giving birth to the modern online negotiation. The benefits of data-driven negotiation in the opinion of Dash and Agarwal (2016) are: a better planning, an improvement of the position of the negotiator, an improved communication, transparency, resource efficiency, enabling the establishment of long-lasting partnerships.

Digital negotiations not only come with advantages but also have their own challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the loss of direct human contact and non-verbal communication (Vuchkovski et al., 2023). In traditional negotiations, non-verbal communication, such as facial expressions and body language, play an important role in understanding and interpreting messages. In the online environment this aspect is significantly reduced (Bobkina, Romero and Ortiz, 2023). Another important aspect is the use of data and analytics to make informed decisions and evaluate performance during negotiations. This data-driven approach can help identify weaknesses and opportunities for improvement and increase the chances of success in negotiations (Dash and Agarwal, 2016). A good negotiation approach is based on creating value for both parties (win-win). Instead of treating negotiation as a win-lose confrontation, effective negotiation should aim for a win-win outcome. This way, long-lasting relationships can be built, based on trust and collaboration.

2. Research methodology

To investigate the skills needed to conduct online negotiations, a qualitative approach was adopted, based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling allowed the selection of 36 representatives from Romanian companies that actively participated in online negotiations during the COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring the relevance and recency of their experiences. The interviews were conducted based on a semi-structured guide, which included questions about communication strategies, challenges encountered and critical skills needed for success. All interviews were recorded (with consent), transcribed in full and anonymized to protect the confidentiality of the participants. A combination of

qualitative methodologies and natural language processing (NLP) techniques were used to identify relevant competencies in online negotiations. Purposive sampling allowed the selection of 36 representatives of Romanian companies that actively participated in online negotiations during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their responses were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interviews were fully transcribed, anonymized, and thematically analysed according to the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) identification of themes, (4) revision of them, (5) definition and naming of themes, and (6) writing the final report.

Manual coding of the data allowed the identification of emerging themes, and triangulation of the results was achieved using keyword frequency visualization (word clouds) and statistical analysis. The responses of 36 participants were pre-processed using the NLTK library in Python, including tokenization, stop word removal, and text normalization. The frequencies of the words were analysed to identify the main themes and then visualized as a word cloud generated with the Word Cloud library (Stanca, Dabija and Câmpian, 2023; Moldovan et al., 2024; Stanca, Câmpian and Dabija, 2025). The analysis highlighted the importance of skills such as effective communication, active listening and empathy, providing a solid and replicable foundation for understanding and developing critical skills in online negotiations. Statistical tests (Chi-Square) provided additional insights into how these skills cluster and manifest in practice, highlighting the diversity of strategies and approaches used by negotiators. This detailed analysis aims to highlight the critical skills that contribute to effective negotiation and to provide a basis for developing individual competencies in online negotiation.

The results of the analysis revealed the importance of skills such as effective communication, active listening and empathy, highlighting the role of authentic interactions and mutual understanding in digital negotiations. By applying a rigorous and replicable qualitative methodology, this study provides a solid basis for understanding and developing essential competencies in the context of online negotiations. In the analysis of negotiation skills, the frequency with which certain skills are mentioned and their impact in the context of online negotiation was examined. Skills such as effective communication, active listening and empathy were identified as essential for success in online negotiation, reflecting the importance of authentic interaction and mutual understanding.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Descriptive analysis of results

The word distribution shows that most responses received are short, with a significant peak around 0-25 words. 12 responses fall into this category, indicating that many respondents provide concise responses. As the number of words increases, the frequency of responses decreases, with longer responses, over 100 words, being even rarer. The average length of the responses is 39.50 words, and the median length is 21.0 words. Most responses do not contain positive words, indicating a tendency towards neutrality or negativity. As the number of positive words increases, their frequency decreases significantly. Only a few responses include more than two positive words, suggesting that positive expression is seldom in the dataset analysed. This distribution may reflect the overall tone of the communication, emphasizing the importance of context and the emotions conveyed.

3.2. Word cloud analysis

The words "you" (3.07%) and "skills" (2.84%) appear most frequently, indicating a focus on personal involvement and specific skills in the context of negotiation. The presence of the words "important" (2.36%) and "negotiation" (2.25%) suggests an emphasis on identifying skills crucial for success in online business negotiation. The terms "communication" (1.89%) and "ability" (1.77%) emphasize their importance as essential skills, being considered fundamental for a successful negotiator in the virtual environment.

The terms "listening" (1.54%) and "active" (1.06%) highlight the importance of active listening in the online negotiation process, while "understanding" (1.06%) and "empathy" (0.83%) emphasize the need for deeper understanding and emotional intelligence. Phrases such as "ability to" (15 occurrences) and "the ability to" (13 occurrences) suggest a focus on the individual's capabilities and potential to conduct online negotiations. The expressions "active listening" (8 occurrences) and "in negotiation" (7 occurrences) emphasize specific skills and the context in which they are applied. The phrases "I think" (6 occurrences) and "important to" (5 occurrences) reflect personal opinions and the relevance of these skills in negotiations. These terms are gathered in the word cloud in Figure no. 1.
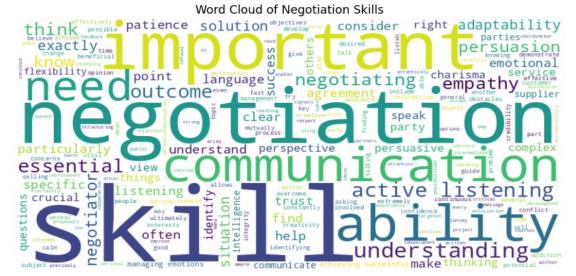
Figure no. 1. Word cloud of negotiation skills

The word cloud (figure no. 1) visually highlights the words "important", "negotiation", "skills", "communication" and "ability" as prominent, reinforcing the emphasis placed in the text on these essential aspects. The presence of terms such as "understanding", "empathy", "active listening" and "adaptability" aligns with the data analysed, underlining the perceived importance of these skills in the context of online negotiations.

The analysis highlights a strong focus on communication and active listening skills, as essential components of effective online negotiation. The emphasis on personal skills and deep understanding highlights the nuanced nature of successful online negotiation tactics. Overall, the data highlights the diversity of skills required for effective negotiation, with communication and active listening at the forefront, as aspects considered fundamental to reaching a favourable agreement and successfully implementing an online negotiation.

3.3. Identifying online negotiation skills

The most frequently mentioned negotiation skills are effective communication (90%) and active listening (75%), crucial aspects in the online negotiation process, but also identifying solutions to emerging problems. "*Effective Communication: Clear and concise communication is vital for conveying your own interests and proposals. This includes not only verbal communication, but also non-verbal cues and written communication skills*" (Interviewee 22). "*Active Listening: The ability to listen attentively to the other party's concerns, interests, and perspectives is crucial. Active listening demonstrates respect and helps identify potential areas of agreement*" (Interviewee 11). Of course, there are other important skills for the success of online negotiation, including empathy (60%) and persuasion (70%), because this is how the interlocutor's influence can be understood in the online negotiation process: "*Emphatic communication: It is very important to know how to communicate to the supplier you are talking to exactly what you need, to leave no room for interpretation, and to make sure that you get what you need, and not more expensive and high-performance things for example that you don't necessarily need*" (Interviewee 7). "*Persuasion: It's important to know how to talk to suppliers in a way that works to your advantage and get them to understand exactly what your requirements are*" (Interviewee 18). "*Ability to synthesize: Suppliers often do their job, and try to sell you more than you need, so it's very important to be able to extract from the information they present what exactly you need and are looking for and then analyse whether or not what they offer is right for you*" (Interviewee 22).

Other important skills in online negotiation are the ability to solve problems/challenges that arise (50%) and adaptability/flexibility to the online negotiation context (55%), which emphasizes the need to resolve obstacles and remain flexible in the face of changes of any kind: "*Problem-Solving Behaviour: Negotiation often involves finding creative solutions to complex issues. Strong problem-solving skills enable you to identify mutually beneficial options and overcome obstacles*" (Interviewee 17). "*Flexibility/Adaptability: Flexibility is essential in negotiation because situations can change rapidly. Being open to adapting your strategies based on the situation can be the difference between success and failure*" (Interviewee 3).

Respondents believe that the skills on which the success of negotiation may depend include the depth of knowledge of the subjects investigated (49%), respectively the adequate understanding and previous

knowledge of the opponents/interlocutors (42%): "*Subject Matter Expertise: Knowledge of the subject matter is crucial because it allows you to speak with authority and credibility. When negotiating, people are more likely to trust you if you demonstrate a deep understanding of the topic discussed*". (Interviewee 9) "*Knowing Your Audience: Understanding the needs, preferences, and motivations of the people you are negotiating with is fundamental to achieving successful outcomes. In my opinion, when you know your audience, you can speak their language and address their specific concerns*". The success of online negotiation may also depend on the charisma of the interlocutors (28%): "*I find charisma to facilitate extremely well the way a negotiation goes*". (Interviewee 2).

Last but not least, aspects such as: "*Emotional self-control, structuring ideas within the speech, using non-verbal and para-verbal language to convey the intended message*" were mentioned (Interviewee 8); "*offering targeted feedback & continuous improvement of personal weaknesses*" (Interviewee 5); the ability to analyse the interlocutor's experience "*identifying the experience and temperament of the negotiators*" (Interviewee 7); "*to have the creativity to handle unforeseen situations and scenarios, and ultimately bring them to the side that wants to win the discussion*" (Interviewee 15); "*Patience, courage, a good listener, calm*" (Interviewee 19); "*Patience. You have to be patient with the other parties, so you can find out exactly what they are seeking from you, and vice versa*" (Interviewee 22).

Chi-Square tests show that active listening (p-value: 0.0498) and empathy (p-value: 0.0275) have a statistically significant impact in the context of online negotiations, suggesting that these skills are more frequently encountered in a negotiation. They are followed by identifying solutions to challenges arising in the negotiation (p-value: 0.0122) and flexibility in identifying a suitable solution (p-value: 0.0334). The correlation between the age of the interlocutors/participants in the negotiations and the number of skills mentioned (coefficient 0.32) is not significant, indicating a weak link between them.

Technology plays a key role in improving negotiation outcomes. One of the nowadays key aspects in the negotiation process is the ability to communicate effectively in the online environment. The use of digital tools and advanced technology can help increase efficiency and accuracy in the negotiation process. As technology continues to advance, the future of negotiation in the digital age looks promising. The use of artificial intelligence and other advanced technologies is expected to become increasingly widespread and contribute to improving negotiation outcomes. It is also anticipated that new digital tools and collaboration platforms will be developed and used to support the negotiation process.

To overcome the challenges emerged in the modern negotiation process, it is important to pay attention not only to the use of new techniques such as artificial intelligence or word cloud, but special attention must also be paid to the tone and style of the messages. These must be clear and concise, but also to convey emotions and intentions through words. It must be used a clear and concise language, avoid ambiguity, and ensure that all parties understand the messages being conveyed. Furthermore, it is also useful to use video technology to facilitate communication and create a sense of closeness in digital negotiations, while paying attention to time management and priorities in digital negotiations.

Since communication mainly takes place through written messages, it is important to respond promptly and set clear deadlines for each stage of the negotiations. By establishing common goals and identifying solutions that benefit both parties, partners can maximize their collaboration opportunities and achieve positive long-term results.

Conclusions

Mastering the art of digital negotiation is essential to gain a winning edge in today's business world. The use of technology and digital tools can increase efficiency and accuracy in the negotiation process and lead to better results. However, it is important to pay attention not only to improve the skills of the participants involved in the negotiation process, but also to adapt the traditional negotiation techniques to the online environment, in order to overcome the specific challenges of digital negotiations.

Advanced negotiation techniques are not just about exchanging offers and counteroffers but involve detailed preparation and a detailed understanding of the negotiating partner, as well as the variables that can influence the outcome. Knowing the profile of the person you are going to negotiate with, managing price, time and delivery deadlines while creating value for both parties are essential components of a successful negotiation.

By understanding and using technology correctly in negotiation, new opportunities can be opened, and success can be achieved in the ever-evolving digital environment.

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