

Globočnik Žunac, Ana; Kocijan, Samanta; Martinčević, Ivana

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Impact of Modern Communication Channels on Business Processes

Ana Globočnik Žunac
University North, Croatia
Samanta Kocijan
University North, Croatia
Ivana Martinčević
University North, Croatia

Abstract

Business organizational communication, due to digitalization and transformations that take place in this sense in all business processes, takes a significantly different form from the one that used to be usually up to recently. Online business communication is usually more economical and faster than offline communication, and this reflects its important advantages, but the lack of contact can be one of the disadvantages and can lead to information overload and reduced concentration of recipients. The pandemic, which has driven businesses to focus on digital communication channels as much as possible, certainly has a significant impact on accelerating this change. Determining the extent to which these channels are optimal for overall business and communication processes is the focus of this paper, which presents secondary research of available scientific theory. The aim of this paper is to gather in one place the known scientific facts and determine in which future direction research of business communication should go. The paper shows the impact of the need to adapt to new communication channels on stress levels and points to the problem of a lack of feedback with nonverbal signals that are common in traditional contact communication (which is not online). In addition, the results indicate increased use of written business communication, which raises questions about the increased need for education in this regard.

Keywords: digital communication channels, digital communication transformation, business communication channels, business communication as a source of stress, written and oral business communication

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Introduction

Digital communication transformation has significantly changed traditional ways of communication. Despite major changes in the very process of communication (regardless of the elements that determine it), success remains the most important element of the process. According to Rouse et al. (2005), in order to perform a successful communication, information must be "accurately received in terms of the content and meaning specified by the sender." Therefore, the existence of a channel by which the desired information will be transmitted is necessary. A channel is a specific technology or method by which a message is transmitted to the recipient (Rouse et al., 2005). Kotarba (2018) defines digital transformation as the adaptation of business models, which results from the "dynamic pace of technological progress and innovation that drives changes in consumer and social behavior." Boneva (2018) concludes that "it is proven and justified that digital transformation is carried out in an algorithm that begins with digital audit, continues with strategy development, setting measurable goals, by setting priorities, assessing the impact achieved by measuring results, and finally, "concluding" it with suggestions for improvements and a theoretical model of the algorithm for implementing digital business transformation."

Today, there are numerous papers on the application of digital technologies in business, and thus various theories are available on the impact of the same on the business of companies that apply them, and this topic directly or indirectly affects business communication. Davidson et al. (2010), in their work, address the question of how to better understand the nature of entrepreneurship in the digital economy, and Huang et al. (2017) studied WeCash, Chinese digital venture. Furthermore, a study from Kuester et al. (2018) explores ways in which start-ups should design market entry strategies to facilitate the adoption of e-innovation. Nambisan et al. (2019), in their paper, analyze the roles that entrepreneurs play in digital ecosystems and indicate that due to incompatibility and conflict of roles, high levels of stress are often present. As modern ways of communication are increasingly associated with stress, the number of literature in this area is growing. Yin et al. (2014) examined the effects of mobile technology on individual satisfaction. They found that there are two sources of "techno-stress": "techno-overload" and "techno-insecurity," which they assume negatively affect job satisfaction, and also assume that self-efficacy positively affects job satisfaction. Tarafdar et al. (2007) investigated the effects of stress created by information and computer technology (ICT), or "technostress," and connected it with individual productivity. The same authors, Ragu-Nathan et al. (2008), a year later published another relevant paper in this field in which they study the phenomenon of technostress, as the stress of end-user of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). They examine the impact of this type of stress on the end-user through job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, and intention to stay in the organization.

The purpose of this study is to compile all available scientific information in one place and establish which route corporate communication research should go in the future. The study examines the influence of the need to adapt to new communication channels on stress levels, as well as the issue of a lack of feedback via nonverbal signs, which is frequent in traditional touch communication (which is not online).

Modern communication channels

The total of the world population has 67% of mobile phone users, while 60% are Internet users. There are 53% of active users of social networks in the world. In Croatia, out of the total population of 4.12 million people, 5.19 million or 126% have mobile phone connections, 76% are Internet users, and there are 51% those are active users of social networks. As far as the popularity of social networks is concerned, Facebook is in the lead position, followed by Youtube, WhatsApp, and Facebook Messenger. According to the above-mentioned data, it is concluded that the number of connected mobile phones in Croatia is higher than its total population. Also, the data on Internet users stands out, as there is 60% worldwide, and in Croatia, there is 76%.

According to data obtained through a survey conducted in Croatia in 2020, on 147 respondents aged 15 to 50+ years of age, there were 19.7% of respondents agreed with the statement that communication affects business performance, and 71.4 % of respondents completely agreed with the same statement. The same survey found that as many as 92.5% of respondents in organizations use "face-to-face", i.e., oral communication, while there are 19.7% respondents who use online oral communication in organizations; further, 11.6% of respondents agreed that they prefer virtual meetings over traditional ones, and 15.6% of respondents fully agreed with the same. There are 8.8% of respondents who use virtual meetings on a daily basis, and 27.2% do not use this way of meeting at all. There are 23.1% of respondents who agree that virtual meetings create stress, and 17% of those completely agree with that. In organizations, 50.3% of respondents practice written communication, and 0.7% of them practice written non-electronic communication. There were 53.8 % of respondents who used virtual meetings during the coronavirus pandemic (Sokač, 2020).

In a survey conducted by the agency We Are Social et al. (2020) on platforms used for the purpose of business communication, it was found that 92% of respondents use e-mail. As many as 79% of respondents use messaging services, and 71% of respondents use video calls. There are 66% of respondents use social networks. In the same study in the part of investigating B2B, the following data were obtained when examining preferences: for the purpose of contacting suppliers, e-mail is preferred by 51.8% of respondents, 39.1% of respondents prefer calls to sales representatives, 27.7% of respondents prefer the use of contact forms on suppliers' websites, 27.5% prefer conversations at business or trade events, 23.2% of respondents prefer contact via social network, 3.9% of respondents prefer some other options, and 2.2% of them prefer making a purchase without communication. Decisions to discover new brands according to data obtained through the same research are made on the basis of suppliers' websites (42.9% of respondents), video sites such as Youtube (37.6%), social networks (36.6%). Regarding the source of information, as the most influential, i.e., most relevant, the respondents mentioned: suppliers' websites (39.7% of respondents), web browsers (36.5%), video sites such as Youtube (33.5%), and social networks (30.7%). For B2B communication, Youtube is preferred by 50.9% of respondents, 48.5% of respondents prefer Facebook, and Whatsapp 38.6% of them. In addition to the above, Instagram prefers slightly fewer of them or 36.2%, and LinkedIn 33.0% of respondents. The reasons for the use of social networks by companies, according to their employees, are as follows: to share general updates within companies (58.5%), direct communication with consumers (57.8%), share marketing messages (53.4%), read industry news (44.7%), follow other companies (44.0%) and sales (37.7%).

Modern communication channels and changes in business processes

Modern communication channels have a great impact on every part of a company's business, from that basic, everyday, internal to carefully planned, external communication. According to data obtained by Hootsuite (2020), "although 75% of companies focus on customers as a key audience on social media, mature organizations have expanded their strategy. It is almost twice as likely that they will connect with communities, employees, and partners in this way. Almost 70% of them see significant overall success by focusing on these overall business relationships. E-mail is increasingly being replaced by new ways of communication. Some of the reasons for pushing email out of use in favor of more modern channels, states Smarp (2020): "Loss of productivity and inability to immediately focus on what really matters," also points out that "emails focus on individual conversations, while organizations are increasingly focusing on teamwork and collaboration." Despite the many advantages in terms of speed and simplicity offered by modern Instant messaging, the negative aspects are increasingly being attributed to it. One of the most important shortcomings is the influence on concentration and more frequent interruptions of work. Ou et al. (2010), on the other hand, note that downtime caused by Instant messaging, viewed as a whole, has no significant effects because IM causes only 6% of downtime, while at the same time, it has a significant impact on interactivity. This is based on research data, which showed that IM has positive effects on communication and teamwork. Furthermore, they note that their discovery actually suggests that trust is the fundamental driver of the quality of teamwork, and IM can contribute to that trust. However, they also suggest that Instant messaging facilitates connectivity, but at the same time, contributes to the above-mentioned work interruptions, yet, as they point out, through communication and trust, these negative effects can be ignored.

Gartner (2020) conducted a survey that included 317 CFOs/leaders. Data collected through this survey reveal that after COVID, there are 19, 74% of respondents would move at least 5% of their employees to telework, and nearly a quarter of respondents said at least 20% of employees would permanently move to telework. The survey by SAP et al. (2020), which involved more than 2,000 employees in Germany, Australia, France, the UK, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United States in 2020, found data that, according to the respondents, those who worked from home during the survey period had impaired mental health (44.4% of respondents). In addition to the above, the research also showed that those who applied to work from home for more than 2 weeks were even 50% more likely to state that their mental health was impaired due to "more chronic sadness and chronic fatigue." Furthermore, according to a WalletHub survey that surveyed Americans about working from home during a pandemic period and potential return to office work, a third of Americans believe that employees who refuse to return to the office should be fired, and 67% of respondents believe that those must not be fired. About 50 percent of parents who have young children don't think that the pupils are more productive working from home. Nearly a third of Americans think physical offices are a thing of the past, and almost 60% of Americans think that COVID-19 has changed the way it works for the better (Forbes, 2020).

Modern channels of communication today affect every part of the organization's business. Opportunities for marketing advertising and approaching consumers, thanks to digital technologies, are constantly growing.

Pihir et al. (2019) point out that marketing, with the help of digital technology, enables full connection of companies with end-users through which they get accurate information about the habits and needs of consumers. They further state that the owner of the company is also important because, through the owner's personality, unique skills, and way of communicating with customers, the company as a personal brand is presented. In cooperation with customers, products and services that fully meet their needs are created, which further influences the creation of long-term relationships and the creation of loyalty. Pihir et al. (2019) state that the way the products and services are presented depends very much on the technology used for those occasions, from devices to applications that enable communication. This facilitates the connection of small and medium-sized enterprises with potential and existing users, where at the same time, small and medium-sized enterprises constantly collect user data and build their database and business network. According to Jevremović et al. (2017), digital marketing significantly changes the ways of communicating with potential consumers. It should not be viewed in isolation from traditional marketing, but it is necessary to adapt the content of the message, time, and ways of sending messages to new digital media that make it easier to find potential consumers and take their place in their minds.

Berman et al. (2016) note that digital technologies have redefined the way people live. Furthermore, they point out that technology is already changing traditional industrial structures and the economy and reinterpreting what it means to be a customer and a citizen. To thrive in a rapidly changing business environment, organizations will need to offer customers new, compelling experiences, establish a new focus, build a new level of expertise, and find out new ways of working. Çizmeçi et al. (2015) claim that the most important element in changing the way of using communication tools is reflected in the transition of users from passive to active.

In addition to external communication aimed at consumers and the general public, modern communication channels significantly affect internal communication in organizations. Here, technostress stands out as one of the most important issues in the available literature. As Salmoun et al. (2020) state, the stress in general, and the one that causes digital communications in particular, has an impact on the individual and the organization, ultimately on productivity itself. They also refer to the fact that at the same time, this productivity is usually the goal for which such means are used in order to enable modern communication. It is actually visible that stress is one of the relevant factors and needs to be continuously monitored so as not to have a counter-effect, and thus the organization could find itself in a vicious circle. As well, the organizations try through modern solutions to achieve higher productivity which moves the organization away from the set goal of higher productivity.

Discussion

Today, everything that is in trend is available online, and there are more and more offers that are available exclusively online. In fact, one can conclude that if something isn't online, it's not even in trend. Digital communication channels enable fast and efficient, as well as economical, written, and oral business communication. Companies that have recognized modern opportunities and used them properly enjoy a competitive advantage and consumers' loyalty. When it is not about internal communication within the company, but about communication aimed at a specific external public, it is advisable to use a 360° strategy, a combination of several channels; owned media; website/blog, profiles on social networks, own channels on platforms such as YouTube, newsletters and the like, paid media; advertising services provided by other companies and earned media; public opinion and the sharing of

opinions about the company by consumers. In short: publicity. Provided the previous channels are used properly, they can have extremely positive effects on a company's business. When combining channels, it is necessary to determine whether formal or informal communication is in target, and it is always crucial to know who the recipient of the message is, to determine whether it communicates to an individual or a target group, and to adapt the communication to the recipient in order to ensure understanding of the message. Also, an important element to be determined relates to the type of message, whether it is shared with the general public or is of a confidential nature. It is also extremely important to determine whether the recipient requires to respond or whether the communication is one-way. When adapting the message, it is also important to analyze the competition, consumers who make up the target group, and also the general public that creates public opinion about the company. When all the elements are determined, and the goal (with a tendency to be SMART) is achieved, then the success of such communication becomes measurable. The most important determinant is to have information about the success of communication as the information of meeting goals set by the organization.

During the lockdown caused by the coronavirus pandemic, virtual stores became more popular than ever before, requiring many companies to adapt their businesses, and most of all, to adapt communication to consumers. In addition to the above, the coronavirus also affected teleworking, which also became much more applicable at this time than could have been imagined before 2020. In addition to the classic home offices that employees create themselves at home, today, there are telework centers equipped with modern technology that has brought the speed and quality of work to a higher level. For the business of modern companies, modern communication channels primarily signify a change in the way and approach to internal and external communication. When it is about modern business methods of communication, we often think of external communication and all the possibilities and advantages that it brings with it, although of course, as in any field, this also has its drawbacks. But what must not be forgotten is precisely internal business communication, the one that affects employees. Modern communication within companies brings with it many advantages that are visible through this work, but the disadvantages, even if there are much fewer of them, but can have very adverse effects on employees that form the foundation of any organization. In case employees are exposed to the adverse effects listed through this paper; in the form of overload, disturbances of concentration, frequent interruptions of work, it is very certain that over time the positive effects of their work will diminish, and thus the business results of the company, to which business employees contribute.

Conclusion

Constant availability is one of the results brought by modern communication channels, and this result is seen both as an advantage and as a disadvantage. The advantages in the form of faster, easier, and more economical communication are followed by disadvantages such as lack of personal, physical contact, where body language is increasingly being neglected and seems that be losing importance, as well as the burden of the various load of messages and notifications, enabled by digital communication. Also, it is necessary to monitor technology in the form of equipment with modern devices, high-speed Internet, and constant education of employees and their monitoring of trends, especially those in advertising and sales. As a very small number of recent papers have been found that directly link the issue of stress in the business environment and modern communication channels, it is

recommended for further research to focus on the stress and congestion caused by modern ways of communication in the business environment. It is also advisable to investigate how often and to what extent companies invest in raising awareness of this issue and reducing its negative effects, and how much is the awareness of employees about the impact of such communication on their mood, feelings of overload, and stress at work and after work. It is also proposed to investigate the extent to which employees are educated on how to use modern methods of communication, how often they change the devices needed for work communication, and how this affects employees in such business environments (whether modern communication channels make them more satisfied or the same result in opposite effects).

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About the authors

Ana Globočnik Žunac has a Ph.D. in Information Communication Science at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb. Employed as a senior lecturer at University North, Department of Business and Management, her research focus is organizational communication and interpersonal relationships within business processes. She teaches business communication and human resource management subjects, and she is a scientific associate in the interdisciplinary field of economics and information communication sciences. She has worked on the development of international academic cooperation and is a member of international scientific editorials. She received several awards for her scientific work and a prize for the development of communicational sciences. The author can be contacted at ana.globocnik.zunac@unin.hr

Samanta Kocijan has graduated from University North and is now working as the Head of the Domašinec County. Her research interests are related to business process management and communication. The author can be contacted at sakocijan@unin.hr

Ivana Martinčević (Ph.D. in economics) works as an Assistant professor at the University North, Department of Logistics and sustainable mobility. She gained her Ph.D. at the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland. She is the author and co-author of numerous domestic and international professional and scientific articles and has participated in several international conferences. The author can be contacted at ivana.martincevic@unin.hr