

THE IMPACT OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND TOOLS ON BUSINESS COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: *This paper examines the impact of digital technologies and tools on business communication in the contemporary business environment through the prism of new communication channels. Every technological breakthrough throughout history has altered the way people communicate, beginning with the discovery of the printing press, telegraph, radio, and television. In the fifth industrial revolution and contemporary environment, business communication becomes increasingly focused on current digital technologies and tools. Traditional communication, which was inherently slow, is being phased out in favor of interactive and quick communication. Communication through modern digital technologies and tools has many benefits, but it also has some drawbacks, including the possibility of misunderstandings and conflict. This paper discusses the digital age's key communication channels, including smart mobile phones, short messages (sms), multimedia messages (mms), voice mail, Viber, WhatsApp, iMessage, Skype, Google Hangouts, Slack, teleconferences, video conferences, e-mail, intranet, organizational social and professional networks, and various business communication applications. Besides from their essential characteristics and advantages, this paper highlights key limitations that should be considered in order to eliminate or lessen misunderstandings and conflict situations.*

Keywords: *digital technologies, business communication, contemporary business, digital age, organizational behaviour.*

JEL classification: *O15, O33.*

INTRODUCTION

Modern technology has altered the way people communicate with one another (Wuersch et al., 2022). Globalization, employee diversity, and digital technology penetration are major variables influencing business communication in the digital age (Dw-

yer, 2020). People are more connected than ever before thanks to advances in modern information and communication technologies (Hazlehurst et al., 2023). Due to the globalization, commodities, services, and information produced in one national economy can be easily transferred with other national economies around the world (Omoredede, 2022). Successful global communication in contemporary business environment is founded on an understanding of differences in values, attitudes, and expectations, and it demonstrates that cooperation in diverse cultural contexts can be challenging and complex (Afridi et al., 2023). Interlocutors must learn about the culture, habits, and business norms of others and put in extra effort during the communication process (Meyer et al., 2023). In the digital age, effective companies have employees who vary by gender, age, religion, ethnic origin, culture, family status, parenthood, and mother tongue. As a result, companies must address workforce diversity challenges in order to maximize the benefits of existing differences. This creates several obstacles in the communication process, as a message that is poorly organized owing to cultural differences might result in misunderstanding and conflict. On the other hand, communication via social media and current platforms results in more effective marketing campaigns, online customer support, and more interaction. Potential clients can ask a question via the Facebook page or Twitter profile and receive a quick response. There are also various discussion forums, video clips, video conferences, webinars. In addition to contact and networking with clients, digital technologies provide significant opportunities for communication with employees who work from home or are on business trips. Contemporary business requires constant interactivity, receiving and responding to messages in real time, active participation regardless of time and location, and rapid and constant changes (Kovaité et al., 2020). New communication channels in digital age have new characteristics regarding interactivity (the forms of interaction that are supported), timing (synchronous or asynchronous), social cues (available range of cues such as facial expression), storage (how to keep data), replicability (possibility to save and forward message), reach (scope of audience), and mobility (possibility for portability) (Hartley et al., 2023).

The aim of this paper is to emphasize the important tools and techniques for business communication in contemporary business environment shaped by digital technologies, as well as to highlight their key advantages and potential shortcomings. The paper is structured as follows. First, the key channels of communication in contemporary environment were presented, with their key characteristics. Then, symbolic communication and emojis were introduced as a unique form of symbolic communication shaped by digital technologies and tools. Finally, the potential negative shortcomings of digital communication channels were discussed, along with crucial advice for overcoming those shortcomings and making the best possible use of these channels.

COMMUNICATION CHANNELS IN CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Communication is any behavior that results in the exchange of messages. It is the transfer and understanding of the meaning of a message (Robbins & Coulter, 2008) sent from one person to another person (in groups, teams, organizational parts, organizations). The importance of business communication is also evidenced by the attitude that it represents the blood flow of every organization, regardless of its activity, financial strength, market, age and size (Bisen & Priya, 2009). Successful team-

work, building and nurturing interpersonal relationships depend on communication skills. Therefore, the communication system holds the whole organization together. The effects of good organizational communication are multiple (Table 1). First of all, good communication causes fewer conflicts, mistakes and misunderstandings between employees. Open communication ensures that all employees understand the organizational vision and mission, but also that they are aware of how their activities contribute to the realization of organizational goals. All this results in greater cooperation, better motivation, productivity, sales and higher profits.

Table 1. Effects of good organizational communication

Reduced	Improved	Increased
Stress	The decision-making process	Degree of cooperation
Conflicts	Troubleshooting	Motivation
Gossip/rumors	Flow of work tasks	Productivity
Errors	Interpersonal relations	Sale
Misunderstanding	Professional reputation	Profit

Source: Adapted from Taylor & Lester, 2009

In the digital economy, thanks to the Internet and the development of information and communication technologies, new forms and channels of communication have appeared (Kraus et al., 2021). Their key advantages are that they enable fast and efficient communication, regardless of geographical location and time zone (Yujie et al., 2022). These new forms of communication are achieved through smart mobile phones, short messages (sms), multimedia messages (mms), voicemail, Viber, WhatsApp, iMessage, Skype, Google Hangouts, Slack, teleconferencing, video-conferencing, e-mail, intranet, organizational social and professional networks, as well as various applications for business cooperation (Jaganjac & Lukić Nikolić, 2023).

Communication channels based on smart mobile phones

The development and mass application of smart mobile phones for business purposes have led to numerous advantages in the communication process. First of all, participants can exchange information in real time, regardless of their location and time zone. This connection is especially important in crisis situations, when employees are on a business trip, geographically dislocated, and when it is necessary to react quickly, convey messages and make decisions (Lazarević & Lukić Nikolić, 2024). Smart mobile phones represent an important mean of communication among younger generations, especially Generation Z (Kollárová et al., 2023). On the other hand, communication via mobile phones can lead to information overload for employees and difficulties in separating time for private life and time for work. Smart mobile phones are accompanied by limited possibilities for creating and sending content, due to the size of the keyboard and the quality of the Internet network. In addition, it has been observed that mobile phone users tend to multitask (reading and sending messages on the go, while shopping, traveling), which can lead to incomplete information and errors in their messages. There are also numerous dangers regarding the safety and security of data sent via smart mobile phones. For

example, if an employee loses a mobile phone on which access to various organizational documents is set, it can jeopardize the safety and security of data.

Mobile phones provide opportunities for following types of communication:

- **Short Message Service - SMS** refers to the option of sending and receiving text messages via mobile phones. The key advantage is that the message can be sent at any time at affordable prices, while the disadvantages are the potential delay of messages due to problems with the operator's network and limitations on the length of the message (number of characters).
- **Multimedia Message Service - MMS** is an option for sending and receiving messages via mobile phones, which in addition to text can contain photos, audio and video recordings.
- **Voicemail on mobile phones.** If the person is unable to answer the call, voicemail can allow the caller to leave the message. In order for this type of communication to be effective, it is necessary to regularly update the greeting message in accordance with the planned schedule, to leave an e-mail address or postal address if that information can be useful for the callers, to emphasize when the person will be available for conversation and to regularly check left voice messages.

Furthermore, there are numerous applications which may be installed on mobile phones such as Viber, WhatsApp, iMessage, Skype, Google Hangouts, Slack etc. which enable fast and easy communication and exchange of various messages (text, photos, audio, video) and calls.

Teleconferencing involves communication between two or more people who are in different locations. The advantages are the ease of entry into the communication process and the availability of participants regardless of geographic location. On the other hand, the very fact that the interlocutors are not present face to face can lead to numerous misunderstandings and conflicts. In this type of communication, there may be barriers related to the quality of the established connection and noise in the environment of the interlocutor or in the communication channels.

E-mail as communication channel

For several decades, e-mail has been an important channel, especially for business communication. It is basically verbal communication in writing form. The popularity of e-mail communication is increasing because most business people own a computer and access to the Internet. E-mail is usually used for various invitations to meetings, lectures, events, cocktails, promotions, etc. Its purpose is short and quick communication - the e-mail is sent in just a few seconds and reaches the recipient immediately. The key advantages of e-mail communication are:

- Enables a quick and easy flow of information between participants who may be in different time zones and different locations. An e-mail can be sent at any time (real time or scheduled) and from any location where there is internet and a computer/tablet/smartphone.
- It reduces costs that are characteristic of other types of communication such as sending postal items and telephone conversations.
- It reduces the use of paper, which contributes to reducing costs and preserving the environment.

- Allows sending of various documents, images, audio and video.
- Identical messages can be sent to e-mail addresses of several people at the same time.

E-mail communication is accompanied by certain disadvantages. First of all, long e-mails can be exhausting to read and difficult to understand. Then, this form of communication should not be used when people are sitting in the same office or can simply pass on information orally. There are companies that, in order to stimulate face-to-face communication, prohibit sending e-mails between employees on certain days, but insist that employees meet and exchange information face-to-face (Lukić Nikolić, 2021). Also, it should be noted that some people do not check their e-mail regularly (they do not have synchronization with their mobile phones, they do not use the computer every day, etc.), while some have unreliable systems that are prone to losing messages and/or their arrival in junk mail that many users do not check.

For successful e-mail communication, it is desirable that the following conditions are met (Smith et al., 2017):

- Regular response to incoming e-mails,
- Conceptualizing a clear and complete message (without ambiguous words, jargon, abbreviations),
- Avoiding sending too many attachments (it is recommended to zip the files before sending),
- Write full name and surname in the signature along with contact information (mobile phone),
- Always check the message before sending and correct spelling and grammatical errors.

The e-mail newsletter for employees is one of the ways to inform employees about events in the organization - about what happened in the previous period, but also about announcements of some future events. It is an information bulletin in electronic form. Adding photos, graphs and videos affects the appearance of the newsletter and the degree of its attractiveness for employees. However, in practice, certain shortcomings of the newsletter came to the fore. First of all, it is sent via e-mails, which is why employees often do not have enough time to read and review it or simply do not even see the e-mail due to a full inbox. Also, the newsletter is sent to all employees - it is largely standardized and does not provide the possibility to adapt the text to certain groups of employees (their position, location, language they speak).

Website, Intranet and podcasts as communication channels

Regardless of whether it is a small organization with a simple structure or a large organization, a website is one of the most important means of communication. In the digital age, a good website allows all interested parties to find the information they need in a simple and quick way, with a few clicks. It can be a means of informing employees, but it is primarily oriented as a means of informing the public, primarily potential clients, business partners and candidates from the labor market.

An intranet is a form of internal communication among employees. It is also known as a system with predefined users and participants because it is used by everyone who is employed in an organization. Through the intranet, information and various documents related to work, tasks and events are sent in written form. Many organi-

zations have switched from e-mails to intranets because it is a much faster and more efficient form of communication between employees, teams, different organizational parts, and at the level of the entire organization. The key advantages of an intranet as an internal communication channel are:

- Employees are familiar with all the happenings in the organization on a daily basis, as well as with the necessary organizational changes.
- The flow of communication is two-way - “from top to bottom” and “from bottom to top” because all employees actively participate in the communication process - not only those at higher hierarchical levels, but also employees at lower levels;
- Encourages introverted employees to give their comments, feedback, proposals, and suggestions because communication is in written form;
- Enables the connection of all employees, regardless of their location and time zone. The intranet can also be set up on smart mobile phones, which enables employees to be constantly informed and connected with colleagues and managers.

Internal podcasts are increasingly used as a form of internal communication with employees. A podcast is an audio or audio-video recording intended for listening or viewing. It is especially useful for providing important information about the organizational culture to the younger generations of employees, then providing information about the achieved results, successes, awards won, and future plans. Organizations use podcasts as a replacement or supplement for conference calls and newsletters. Employees can listen/watch the podcast and gain a better understanding of the message sent to them based on voice and non-verbal communication. However, the podcast also has certain disadvantages, among which are one-way communication and the time it takes to listen/watch to it.

Applications and professional social media as communication channels

In the contemporary business environment, employees are required to share information quickly and to be informed about all important aspects of their work. For this reason, numerous applications for business communication and collaboration have been developed that enable the exchange of messages and various files in real time. Many employees use WhatsApp and/or Viber for business purposes, until modern applications appeared and provided them with much more possibilities and functionalities. Frequently used applications are: Slack, Microsoft Teams, Google Chat, Rocket Chat and Chanty. The usage of applications for business communication and collaboration experienced a significant expansion in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic and working from home, as organizations became aware that e-mails are not a suitable tool for fast and effective communication. In practice, it has been noticed that proper use of these applications may improve employee satisfaction and productivity since they feel like they are a part of the organization, learn from one another, solve problems more effectively, and make better decisions.

Videoconferencing involves video transmission of communication between two or more people who are in different locations. This type of communication allows participants to hear and see each other in real time and has many similarities

to face-to-face communication. Videoconference takes place through various applications (Zoom, Google Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, GoToWebinar) that require internet access, a camera and a microphone. The key advantages of video conferencing are:

- Participants can see each other and can see non-verbal signals;
- Communication takes place in real time;
- Immediate feedback is received;
- Cost savings (participants do not have to come to the meeting place).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, when a huge percentage of employees worked from home, companies shifted to video conferencing for most meetings. This tendency is likely to continue in the future, given the growing number of employees who work from home, in various geographic regions, and time zones.

In the digital age, organizations have various applications at their disposal to collect suggestions, proposals and feedback from employees. These applications allow online collection of employee proposals, commenting on proposals, prioritization, voting for the best proposals and selection of proposals to be implemented. These types of internal communication are important for organizations because they provide the opportunity to hear the voice of employees and lead to an increase in their satisfaction, commitment and engagement (Lukić Nikolić, 2021).

In recent years, organizational social (Twitter, Facebook, Yammer) and professional (LinkedIn) networks have become an important tool for internal organizational communication between employees at different levels and between the organization itself and employees. On these networks, employees can share their successes, joys and good moments at the workplace. They provide the opportunity for all employees, regardless of geographical location and time zone, to communicate and share information with each other through posts, comments, messages, videos. By sharing interesting stories about the organization, its working conditions, team building activities, products and services, employees impact on employer branding.

SYMBOLIC COMMUNICATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Communication is based on a large number of symbols that connect into complex symbolic systems and enable the creation of numerous concepts and communications about various things and phenomena (Rot, 2004). The key feature of symbolic communication is that it is realized through signs that are accepted in a certain community as carriers of some meaning, means of communicating messages, and are connected in systems that, according to certain rules of combination, enable the creation of many signs that have new meanings. Symbolic communication is developed by people who, adopting the language of their community, adopt a handful of symbols, but also create new symbols. The application of symbolic systems, and especially developed language, is a factor of great importance for the development and progress of humanity. It is believed that, thanks to the application of symbols, primarily human speech and various languages, man has become a different and more developed being than all other species.

Symbolic communication has not remained immune to technological progress in the digital age. Namely, during face-to-face communication, a non-verbal message is always sent as an integral part (body language, eye contact, volume, pitch and tone of voice), which increases the chances that the interlocutor will understand the message in the right way. In communication that takes place through digital technologies and

tools, questions and doubts may arise as to whether the interlocutor will understand the message in the right way. For this reason, numerous emoticons have been developed in the form of text character symbols, as well as numerous icons that symbolize emotions - these icons are called emojis (Jaganjac & Lukić Nikolić, 2024).

The word emoticon comes from the English words emotional icon. It is a combination of punctuation marks, letters and numbers in written communication. With the advancement of technology, emoticons have started to be used more and more. The development of modern smartphones gave rise to emojis - coded emoticons. Today, emojis are available in all applications, devices and platforms. It is interesting that back in 2016, a British agency announced a job vacancy for the position of “Emoji Translator”, whose main tasks are decoding emojis and looking at generational, cultural and international differences in their use (Roksandić Kablar, 2021).

The development of emoticons and emojis has led to contradictory attitudes regarding the issue of their justification in business communication. Although most are aware of their role and importance, there are also those who consider emoticons and emojis inappropriate, except in communication between close colleagues. Also, some professionals believe that emoticons and emojis can be misinterpreted and can often allude to certain forms of sexual harassment, inappropriate courtship, and the like. In order to ensure adequate use of emoticons and emojis, it is necessary to consider the following (Bovee & Thill, 2020):

- The sender should know the receivers of the message well and estimate how they will understand and experience the provided emoticon and/or emoji.
- Use emoticons and emojis carefully to retain professionalism.
- If the superior is not using emoticons or emojis, this should be followed.
- Take in mind that emoticons and emojis convey a message. If someone has just reached the position of manager, emoticons and emojis can be an indicator that this person wishes to promote a welcoming environment.
- Avoid using emoticons and emojis in communication with clients and third parties unless you have a deep, long-term relationship with them.
- Avoid using emoticons and emojis in professional communication, such as business plans, proposals, and contracts.
- When sending emoticons and emojis, select those that are commonly used and understood. New and uncommon emoticons and emojis may not be readily understood.

POTENTIAL SHORTCOMINGS OF COMMUNICATION IN CONTEMPORARY BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

E-mails, text messages, instant messages, social and professional networks, as well as other channels of communication in contemporary business environment have certain shortcomings. These include (McShane & Von Glinow, 2017):

Insufficient representation of emotions. People rely heavily on facial expressions and other nonverbal signals when interpreting the emotions of interlocutors. The increasing intensity of written communication, which takes place through modern digital communication channels, leaves interlocutors deprived of non-verbal communication. In the digital age, interlocutors apply certain types of communication in which they try to express their emotions, such as the use of emoticons and emojis.

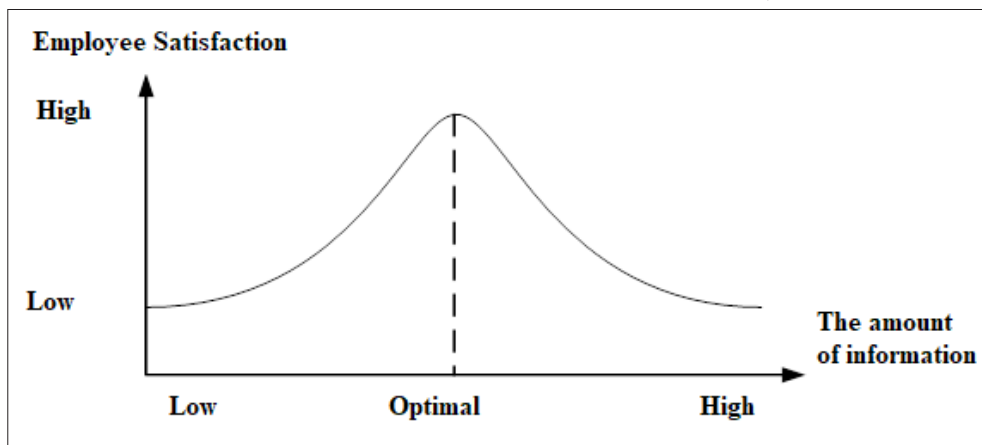
Less politeness and respect. Due to the fact that in written communication the interlocutors cannot see each other, messages sent through digital channels are often characterized as cold and/or without empathy.

Digital communication is **inadequate for messages related to complex and unexpected situations**. Digital communication channels are extremely effective for well-defined situations such as confirming the time and place of a meeting or providing information about some routine activities. However, in the digital age when there are many new, unexpected and complex situations, this type of communication is not ideal because it is necessary for the interlocutors to quickly exchange messages and give each other feedback. In those situations, it is always better to communicate verbally.

Digital communication **can lead to an excessive amount of information (information overload)**. Information overload is a situation when the amount of information exceeds an individual's ability to process and analyze it. Over a long period of time, information overload can lead to anxiety, frustration and dissatisfaction of communication participants.

In practice, it happens that communication in the organization is at extreme values - from its complete absence to an excessive amount of information. Both communication situations lead to reduced employee satisfaction, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The relationship between the amount of information and employee satisfaction



Source: adapted from Opitz & Hinner, 2003

In Figure 1, it can be seen that employees are dissatisfied when they do not have enough information that is important to them in order to effectively perform their part of the job, but also when they receive too much information that has no value and importance for them. The best situation is when employees have the optimal amount of information and when the intensity and volume of communication leave them enough time to perform their work well.

Research conducted among employees who work from home found the following (O'Connell, 2021):

- 81% of employees have experienced conflict at the workplace;
- 46% of employees used applications to send written messages with their

- arguments. These are: Slack, Google Hangouts, Trello;
- 65% of employees had a conflict with colleagues at the same hierarchical level, 19% with superiors, 11% with external partners and 5% with clients;
 - the most common causes of conflicts were: stress due to workload, poor teamwork, rude behavior, lack of transparency, honesty, conflict of interest, false information (accusations);
 - more than 2/3 of the employees thought that the messages they received from their superiors were cold and aggressive;
 - 39% of employees wanted to leave their jobs because of the conflict.

The key causes of conflicts in the digital age are (Jaganjac & Lukić Nikolić, 2024):

Inappropriate communication channels. Managers are frequently confronted with the question of whether employees will take seriously the information delivered to them via Slack or another less formal communication channel. And, in practice, employees often do not take seriously the information they receive through less formal channels of communication.

There are **no rules for desired communication time**, which means communication outside of working hours. It is frequently asked whether it is appropriate to send messages to coworkers via any communication channel outside of working hours, and whether it is reasonable to expect a response to a sent message late in the evening, on weekends, holidays, or days off. Violation of private time can lead to employee dissatisfaction, frustration, and even conflicts. Unfortunately, most organizations lack explicit communication time guidelines. This presents employees with a significant amount of e-mails or messages that they receive 24/7, 365 days a year, disrupting the balance between work and private life.

In addition to the aforementioned, conflicts in the digital age can arise as a result of a **lack of transparency** in communication and informing employees, cold and often aggressive e-mails and communication styles, and increased stress and pressure that employees feel because they believe they are constantly being watched and controlled by modern digital technologies.

New technological solutions bring numerous advantages for business communication, but the following facts should be kept in mind (Bovee & Thill, 2020):

- Technology is just a tool to send messages. Participants in communication must be careful when using modern technologies.
- Technology should be set up to prevent information overload. It often happens that the participants in the communication receive more messages than they can process, which leads to frustration, anxiety, stress and mistakes. Periodically, information channels should be adjusted in order to separate messages that are important from those that are undesirable.
- Technology and new tools should be used in an optimal way. In practice, it has been observed that employees spend too much time on social networks (Facebook, Twitter) and that they often distract them from regular business activities and tasks.
- Technology and new tools should be used effectively. Communication participants need to know the key features, functionalities and options of new technological tools in order to be able to apply them effectively.

At the end, it is important to highlight that technology should not replace face-

to-face communication. Although technology provides opportunities for real-time communication, established interpersonal relationships need to be nurtured. A few minutes of face-to-face communication can lead to increased satisfaction, trust and stronger connection among employees.

CONCLUSION

Successful business communication is an important factor that determines the quality of business relationships and affects business results, as well as interpersonal relationships. With the development of new technological solutions in contemporary business environment, business communication has taken on new properties and features. The most pronounced change in the field of business communication is the emergence of new communication channels. Consequently, the key characteristics of the structuring and shaping of the message are also changing.

The use of modern technologies in communication causes considerable changes. People can always be connected and in touch, actively participate in decision-making, provide and receive feedback, attend all events, and be familiar with all circumstances. However, in business communication, it is critical to avoid conflicting circumstances. The major reasons of conflict in the digital age include increased fluidity and flexibility, the lack of face-to-face contact, and the lack of nonverbal communication. Employees can become more aware of the issues they confront during digital communication by implementing appropriate organizational policies, norms, and practices, as well as trainings. In this way, they can eliminate or at least reduce the causes of conflict situations.

The paper contributes significantly to the topic of business communication and management in contemporary business environment shaped by digital technologies and tools. It gathered current knowledge in a single place and provided a clear understanding of modern communication channels developed through the invention and implementation of modern digital technologies and tools. However, the paper can also be valuable for managers and leaders because it clearly identifies the possible weaknesses and threats that different types of communication in the digital age bring with them.

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