

Exploring Employees Preference of Communication Channel

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to report findings on the relationship of communication technology as a channel for interaction among employees which was conducted in an IT department of a multinational organization located in Malaysia. The paper examines the most used and preferred communication channel by the employee in their organization. Further, to identify if there is a relationship between the preferred communication channel and their perception towards media richness. A total of one hundred and one employees participated in the survey. The result revealed that most of the employees are using “instant messenger” to communicate with each other in their workplace and their most preferred communication channel is “landline telephone”. In addition, a significant positive relationship was identified between the perception of media richness and their preferred communication channel based on Pearson correlation value. The study shows that even though there is a new communication channel that are available and being used extensively, however the employees most preferred communication channel telephone landline which is traditional media.

Key words: Traditional Media • New Media • Media Richness theory • Social presence theory

INTRODUCTION

Interaction among employees plays a key role in ensuring both the employees and the organization's goals are achieved. Communication is the main key in an organization as it creates shared meanings, norms and culture of the organization [1]. Employees interact with each other every day at workplace to perform various tasks. Communication is a crucial aspect in any organizations regardless of the type of the organization. The emergence of both technology and the Internet has become a mechanism to develop communication channel which was not existed before. Innovation started from the basic growth of telephone, radio, television medium and now with satellite communication as well as digital networks [2]. It has brought development in communication medium, which is from traditional media to new media. These new communication technologies have changed the way people communicate with each other, where they communicate through various new types of communication channels. Thus, technological change is one major element which has influenced the communication approaches in organizations. In general,

new media are known as new to the extent that they combine computing, telecommunication network and digitization of content. Essentially, a researcher acknowledges that media derives from two stage process of inventing and social institutionalizing [3], thus it is not entirely the outcome of technical inventions. Research into understanding the factors influencing communication media choice, the relationship created between them and exploring optimal ways of communicating has inspired the interest of academic. Further, researchers have also conducted studies related to computer mediated communication with the regards to its effectiveness and challenges. The scope of this study is media choice and the researcher aim to determine the most preferred communication channel used by the employees in the selected organization and their reason for choosing the communication channel.

Based on the this aim, the researcher has developed four research objectives which are to identify the level of experience of the employees in using the communication channels, to identify the perception of the employees on media richness factors, to analyze which communication channel that is most frequently used by the employees

comparing traditional media to new media and to analyze which communication channel that is most preferred by the employees comparing traditional media to new media. Face to face, telephone and written memos are examples of traditional media and electronic while video conferencing are examples of new media [4]. Likewise to provide an insight how traditional and new media is used in workplace communication.

Literature Review: The study will refer to two main theories which are social presence and media richness theory. These both theories highlight how media vary in few elements.

Social Presence Theory: Social presence theory is one of the first analytic frameworks applied to computer mediated communication was imported from a teleconferencing study [5]. On the other hand, social presence is a sense of being with another in an environment to feel a sense of social presence [6]. An individual must take into account the others in the environment, moving beyond just an awareness of the others. Social presence theory able to determine the way people interact and communicate as the theory emphasize of the quality of a communication medium [7]. Two concepts of social presence are intimacy and immediacy. Intimacy is a function which represents eye context, physical distance and topic of conversation while immediacy conveys through speech and associated verbal and nonverbal cues [8].

Further, this theory explained that, the less warmth and participations the users will experience if the fewer number of cue a system supports. Sociability, warmth and sensitivity are media characteristics that affect the degree to which communicators perceive each other to be psychologically present during an interaction [9]. The social presence theory explains the degree of awareness of the other person during a communication interaction [10]. Moreover, social presence depends on the nonverbal, verbal cues and the communication circumstances apart from the words that are transmitted [10]. Based on the social presence theory, when the communication channel provides adequate social presence for the level of interpersonal involvement for a particular task the communication is perceived as effective. Furthermore, according to the social presence theory, face to face is considered to have the most social presence while written and text based communication has the least [11]. It was also revealed that the effectiveness of communication depends on

the selection of the channel that has the capacity to engage both the sender and the receiver [9]. A rational media choice is based on the requirements of the social environment.

Media Richness Theory: In order to explain the relationship between communication media and performance variables, media richness theory is one of the more prominent theories [12]. Initially the media richness theory was developed and tested using traditional media, however later on it includes the comparison of other types of newer technologies such as electronic mail. In 1994, the researchers describe that, media richness theory proposes that communication media differ in few extends which are, it can overcome various communication constrain of time, location, permanence, distribution and distance [13]. It can transmit social symbolic and nonverbal cues of human communication and convey equivocal information.

Basically, on the ability of the media to carry nonverbal cues, provide instant feedback, convey personality traits and support the use of natural language while communicating is how the media richness theory evaluates the richness of the media [11]. Additionally, the richness of the media depends on feedback, multiple cues, language variety and personal focus [14]. Media richness theory explained the media choice, where the theory proposes that the greater the likelihood of a message being misinterpreted, the greater the need for rich media and suggest that choosing a medium which matches the task is likely to lead the most effective outcome [15].

The Media richness theory proposes a five step continuum of media and their level of richness. Communication media included in this continuum are face to face, phone calls, letters, formal documentation and numeric reports [13]. The channel is considered to be richer if it's able to integrate feedback capability, language variety and personal focus. Communication media differ in their ability to facilitate understanding [14]. Based on its capability to facilitate shared meaning a medium can be characterized as high or low in richness. A rich medium facilitates insight and rapid understanding. Face to face, telephone, addressed documents, unaddressed documents are ranked accordingly in sequence based on its capacity for processing equivocal information. In order to convey messages and reach understanding Individuals rely on language content and audio cues such as tone of voice. Telephone as a communication medium is perceived as personal and uses natural language which makes it relatively rich. Thus according to this

theory, face to face communication is considered as the richest channel [9]. Comparing face to face to computer mediated communication, face to face allows simultaneous communication of multiple cues such as head node, smiles, eye contact, tone of voice, face to face communication also uses a high variety of natural languages and conveys emotions [14]. Besides that, telephone medium is considered as less rich than face to face. Feedback capability is fast, but visual cues and body language are filtered out.

theory provides two basic categories of task characteristics that help determine the appropriate media form to use [12]. First is the level of uncertainty present in the task is said to influence the media choice of communication. Second the level of equivocality involved in the task influences media choice. This theory is one popular theory among the computer mediated communication models as its basic concept is naturally appealing. This includes the number of cue systems supported by a medium, the immediacy of feedback that the medium offers, potential for natural language and message personalization. Equivocality is described as the degree to which a decision making situation and information related to the process are exposed to multiple interpretations [5]. This is theories most referred by the scholars to test for these types of topics. For an example, a research conducted by Lee Cheang Ean with the title of the 'computer mediated communication and organizational communication; the use of new of new communication technology in the workplace', published in the year of 2011. The study was to examine the types of communication methods used in the workplace and its purpose. Based on the results, the researcher found that, the employees use computer mediated communication the most, followed by face to face communication, electronic and print media. However, the employees still prefer face to face communication channel compared to computer mediated communication, even though they use computer mediated communication the most. Consequently, it shows that, frequently used communication channel in an organization, may not be the most preferred communication channel by the employees.

Besides that, there was another similar research with the title of 'communication channel used by academic staff in interacting with their students' published in the year of 2009 [16]. The objective of this research was to analyze the impact of communication technology as a channel for the interaction between academic staff and their student. The results of this study explain that, even

though there are communication technologies that are available these days, traditional communication method still continues to be most preferred channels among the academic staff at this institution of higher education. However, even though face to face communication is the most accepted communication method, in some situations new communication media such as email could also offer a better solution in other situations. Moreover, based on this study, email was indicated as the third widely accepted and preferred communication channel among the faculty members to communicate certain types of messages such as to send simple or complex messages.

Additionally, other similar research was identified, which was titled as "the role of email in improving task performance among executives in Malaysia" published in the year of 2011 [17]. This research was conducted by Narges Baninajarian, Zulhamri Abdullah and Jusang Bolong. The main objective of this research was to examine the role of email in improving task performance in organizations among the executives. This study has actually challenged the media richness theory. The result of the study shows that the respondents perceived email to be moderately high rich medium. Therefore, the result has indicated that email richness and email ease of use have a positive significant relationship with task performance. It can be determined that respondent of this study, perceived emails as a rich medium and it is a convenient channel for them to use to make decisions.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study was conducted in one of the multinational organization in Malaysia. The whole employees of the IT department which was 110 were taken as the sample for this study and the research collected 101 responses. In this study, there were no any specific sampling methods that were applied as the number of the population in the organization to the selected department was small. The questionnaire was adapted and modified from [17]. The reliability of all the independent and dependent variables were at expected levels.

- Findings and Analysis
- Respondents' Personal Information

From 101 data that was analyzed, 56.4% were male and 43.6% were female. Most of the 83 (82.2%) respondents were Degree qualified in terms of educational background. This is followed by 17 (16.8%) respondents are qualified as masters holder. 64 (63.4%)

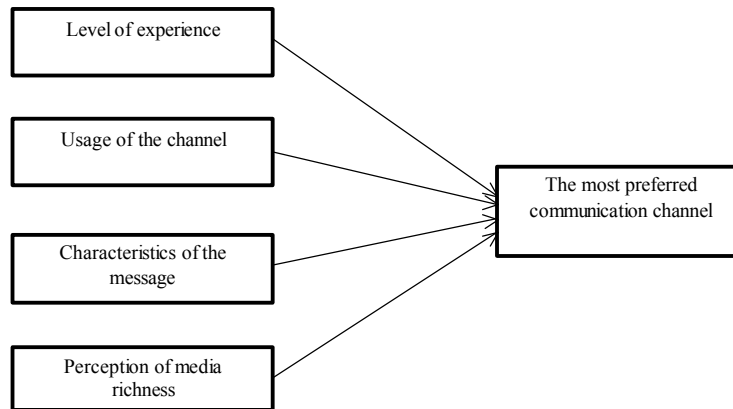


Fig. 1: Research Framework

of the respondents had working experience one to three years in the organization. This is followed by 23 (22.8%) respondents having four to seven years and 14 (13.9%) of the respondents are having working experience less than a year in the organization.

Based on the previous study and theory the framework as in figure 1 was developed to analyze the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable of this study. The independent variables are level of experience, usage of the channel, characteristics of the message and the perception of media richness, while the dependent variable is the most preferred communication channel.

RESULT

The Level of Experience: In order to answer RQ1, responses to the seven channels that were used by the employees were examined. Table 1 summarizes the overall level of experience of communication channel by the employees. The result indicates that the employees considered themselves as most experienced with mobile (Mean = 3.71) and least experience with email and social media (Mean= 3.61). Meanwhile the experience with other channels which are face to face (Mean = 3.67), landline telephone (Mean = 3.67), instant messenger (Mean = 3.67) and webcam (Mean= 3.62) placed between this two channels.

Level of Usage of the Communication Channel: In order to answer RQ2, the average of hours employee spent on each of the communication channel was collected. In addition, the employee’s responses to the most preferred communication channel was also collected. Table 2, summarize the level of usage of the communication channel by the employees. The result indicates that the

Table 1: The level of experience

	Mean	Std. Deviation
FTP	3.67	.950
Landline telephone	3.67	.929
Mobile	3.71	.952
Email	3.61	.990
Instant Messenger	3.67	.918
Webcam	3.62	.947
Social Media (Dell Social Network)	3.61	.969

Table 2: Usage of the communication channel

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Face to Face	3.66	1.186
Landline Telephone	2.69	1.138
Mobile	2.25	1.152
Email	4.43	.931
Instant Messenger	4.50	.867
Webcam	1.12	.325
Social Media (Dell Social Network)	2.23	1.157

employees considered their self-spending the most time in using instant messenger (Mean = 4.50) and least hours spend in webcam (Mean = 1.12). Meanwhile volume of hours spend with other communication which are email (Mean = 4.43), face to face (Mean = 3.66), landline telephone (Mean = 2.69), mobile (Mean = 2.25) and social media (Mean = 2.23) placed between this two extremes.

Table 3 defines the most preferred communication channel by the employees. The responses to all the seven communication channels (including face to face, landline telephone, mobile, email, instant messenger, webcam and social media) were examined. The result indicates that the employees preferred to use landline telephone the most (Mean = 3.85), followed by webcam (Mean = 3.81), face to face (Mean = 3.78), mobile (Mean = 3.78), email (Mean = 3.77), instant messenger (3.77) and social media is the least preferred communication channel (Mean 3.73).

Table 3: most preferred communication channel

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Face to Face	3.78	.955
Landline Telephone	3.85	.841
Mobile	3.78	.879
Email	3.77	.958
Instant Messenger	3.77	.915
Webcam	3.81	.967
Social Media (Dell Social Network)	3.73	1.130

Table 4: Employee's perception of media richness

	Mean	Std. Deviation
The channel must convey personality traits among the employees	3.74	.934
The channel should ensure the message reaches the recipient instantly	3.80	.872
The channel should be able to provide immediate feedback	3.69	.987
The channel should carry both verbal and nonverbal cues	3.79	.887

Based on the result from table 2 and table 3 it shows that, employee spend the most time in using instant messenger (Mean = 4.50) while their most preferred communication channel is landline telephone the most (Mean = 3.85). This further explains that, even though the employees spent the most time in using instant messenger, this doesn't influence their most preferred communication channel.

Perception of Media Richness: RQ3 questioned the employee's perceptions of the media richness. Table 4 below shows the result of the employees towards their perception of media richness. In this part, employees were requested to provide reasons for their selection for certain medium in communicating with their co-workers. Employees agrees the most that the communication channel should ensure the messages reaches the recipient instantly (Mean = 3.80).

Secondly the communication channel should be able to carry both verbal and nonverbal cues (Mean = 3.79), followed by the channel must convey personality traits among the employees (Mean = 3.74) and the channel should be able to provide immediate feedback (Mean= 3.69).

Communication Channel Used Based on Type of Task: RQ4 was questioned to examine which communication channel the employees use most frequently to send special messages. Table 5 below summarizes the result

Table 5: Communication channel used based on type of task

Type of Message	Communication Channel	Frequency	Percent
Straightforward / clear	Face to Face	10	9.9
	Landline Telephone	2	2.0
	Mobile	9	8.9
	Email	24	23.8
Simple	Instant Messenger	56	55.4
	Face to Face	10	9.9
	Landline Telephone	3	3.0
	Mobile	8	7.9
Ambiguous	Email	24	23.8
	Instant Messenger	56	55.4
	Face to Face	45	44.6
	Landline Telephone	13	12.9
Complex	Email	37	36.6
	Instant Messenger	6	5.9
	Face to Face	11	10.9
	Landline Telephone	1	1.0
	Mobile	7	6.9
	Email	25	24.8
	Instant Messenger	57	56.4

of the type of communication channel that the employee use at workplace to send certain type of messages which are to send straightforward, simple, ambiguous and complex messages. Based on the results it shows that employee prefer to use instant messenger (55.4%) the most to send straight forward message, followed by email (23.8%), face to face (10%), mobile (8.9%) and landline telephone (2%). In order to communicate simple messages, the employee would prefer to choose instant messenger (55.4%) the most, followed by email (23.8%), face to face (9.9%), mobile (7.9%) and landline telephone (3.0%).

To communicate ambiguous message, the employee prefers to use face to face communication the most (44.6%). 36.6% of the employee prefers to use email communication, followed by landline telephone (12.9%) and least preferred is instant messenger (6%). While to communicate complex messages, 56.4% of the employees prefers to communicate using instant messenger. 24.8% of the employees prefer to use email, followed by face to face communication (10.9%), mobile (6.9%) and landline telephone (1.0%).

Relationship Between Independent Variable and Dependent Variable: In order to see the relationship between the four independent variables and the dependent variable, Pearson correlation test was run. Table 6 summarizes the result of the correlation test.

Table 6: Correlation between independent and dependent variable

Variable	Pearson Correlation	Significant
Level of experience	0.506 (0.00)	0.00
Volume of hours spent	0.052 (0.605)	0.605
Characteristics of message	-0.104 (0.303)	0.303
Perception of media richness	0.890 (0.00)	0.00

Table 7: Paired sample t-test (traditional media: Face to face)

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 FTF-Mobile	0.00	100	1.000
Pair 2 FTF-Email	0.115	100	0.909
Pair 3 FTF-Instant_Messenger	0.123	100	0.902
Pair 4 FTF-Webcam	-0.345	100	0.731
Pair 5 FTF-Social Media	0.390	100	0.697

Table 8: Paired sample t-test (traditional media: Landline telephone)

Variable	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pair 1 Landline-Mobile	-6.15	100	0.540
Pair 2 Landline-Email	0.865	100	0.389
Pair 3 Landline- Instant_Messenger	0.000	100	1.000
Pair 4 Landline -Webcam	0.928	100	0.356
Pair 5 Landline -Social Media	0.737	100	0.463

Based on the results, it shows that there is a significant relationship between level of experience and the preferred communication channel among the employees ($r= 0.506$, $p=0.00$). Besides that it also shows that there is positive relationship between these two variables. The higher the level of experience in using a communication channel, it may increase the preference of the employees to use the communication channel. Thus, the first hypothesis is supported.. Further, it shows that there is no significant relationship between the volume of hours spent and the preferred communication channel among the employees ($r=0.052$, $p=0.605$). Besides that it also shows that there is low relationship between these two variables. Thus, the second hypothesis is rejected.

The results of the analysis also shows that there is no significant relationship between the characteristic of the message and the preferred communication channel among the employees ($r=-0.104$, $p=0.303$). Besides that it also shows that there is negative and low relationship between these two variables. Thus, the third hypothesis is rejected. Further the results shows that there is significant relationship between the perception of media richness and the preferred communication channel among the employees ($r=0.890$, $p=0.00$). Besides that it also shows that there is a positive and high relationship between these two variables. The higher the level of

social presence and media richness provided by a communication channel, the preference of the employees in using the communication will increase as well. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is supported and accepted..

Difference Between Preference of New Media and Traditional Media: Paired sample t-test was performed in this study to analyze if there is significant difference between the means of two variables, which is traditional media and new media. As for this study, the paired sample t test was conducted among two traditional media and five new media. The two traditional media includes face to face and landline telephone, while the new media includes mobile, email, instant messenger, webcam and social media. Table 7 illustrate the results between the traditional media which is face to face and new media which are mobile, email, instant messenger, webcam and social media. Based on the results it shows that, there is no significant value between face to face communication channels with any of the new media.

Table 8 shows the results between the traditional media which is landline telephone and new media which are mobile, email, instant messenger, webcam and social media. Based on the results it shows that, there is no significant value between telephone landline channels with any of the new media.

DISCUSSION

Based on the correlation results, two of variables have positive relationship towards the employee's preferences of the communication channel. The two aspects are level of experience and the perceptions on media richness. It shows that, the higher the level of experience is using a communication channel, it would increase the preference of the employees to use the communication channel. Further, it also shows that, employees highly give importance to the characteristics of the channel. Employee's preference of communication channel has associate with richness of the media, if the media able to convey personality traits, if the channel could ensure the message reaches the recipient instantly, if the channel able to provide immediate feedback and if the channel should carry both verbal and nonverbal cues.

Further, based on descriptive statistics result it shows that employee prefers to use instant messenger to send straightforward and simple message. The result seems to be against with the results found from a previous study [17] which identifies that academic staff prefers to communicate via face to face with their students

to communicate straightforward and clear messages. However the results supports the concept of social presence [10] and media richness theory [14] as the theory proposes that communicators use a lean channel for straightforward and clear messages. The theory further explains that, computer mediated communication is a lean channel and it is useful for simple or clear messages.

To communicate ambiguous message, the employees prefers to use face to face communication. This finding is also consistent with social media and social presence theory as the theory suggests that a rich medium is useful for ambiguous messages. Additionally, the result of this study is also in line with the findings found from a previous research [17] which identifies that academic staff prefers to use face to face communication to communicate ambiguous messages. Whereas to send complex message the employees prefers to communicate using instant messenger. This finding contradicts with media richness and social presence theory, as these theories suggest that, a high rich medium is needed for those messages which are complex. Moreover, this finding also contradicts with research conducted by [17] as based on the research it shows that academic staff use face to face communication to communicate complex messages. This is because, this research was conducted in a multinational organization where employees also comes from multinational environment. There is the existence of language barrier, thus most of the time, employees prefers to communicate via instant messenger for complex messages, as they can read what is being communicated and understand the message better.

The result of the correlation test also reveals that, the usage of the communication channel and the message characteristics doesn't have any relationship with their preference towards a communication channel. Further, based on the descriptive statistics result it shows that employee usage of instant messenger was the highest, however they seems to prefer to use landline telephone communication the most. It clearly shows that, this aspect doesn't have any association with the preferred communication channel. This result in line with one of the previous research [16] which identify that most frequently used channel may not be the respondent most preferred channel. Based on the study, the most frequently used channels for employee communication is computer mediated communication however face to face communication is perceived as a more effective employee communication channel.

While based on the paired t-test, it indicated that there were no any significant value between traditional media and new media. It further explains that, employee does find any difference between traditional media and new media. They have adapted themselves to the new media and comfortable using channels in new media, as how comfortable are they in using traditional media. They are able to use and apply both types of media at their workplace.

CONCLUSION

The major conclusion of this research is that employees most preferred communication is one of the communication channels which belong to traditional media compared to new media. Even though employee uses instant messenger the most in their workplace, their most preferred communication channel is a landline telephone. It further explains that in organizations new media are being used massively. The emergence of both internet and technology, have produced many new communication channels which range from email, instant messenger and social media. Each of these communication channels seems to have its own features and functions. Employees as well as the organization utilize these communication channels according to their preference, task and situation. Both medium, traditional and new media are practiced in the organization. This study can extend the research towards the social presence and media richness theory as some of the do inline and contradicts among these theories. The research would suggest other scholars to perform research on the differences that was identify compared to previous studies. The differences could occur due to the organizational culture and working environment of the selected organization.

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