

AN INSIGHT INTO ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION IN FORMAL BUSINESS ORGANISATIONS**BY****OJO, Azeez O.: Federal Polytechnic, Ede, Osun State, Nigeria;****E-mail: azeezsunkanmi62@gmail.com****Abstract**

The uniqueness of formal business organisations is no doubt tied to effective communication irrespective of the nature of organisational structure and management philosophies. Efficiency and effectiveness, in terms of cost and timeliness of information delivery in contemporary formal business organisations, are factors that have made the difference between high performing organisations of such and those that have average or sluggish performance records. It is on record that conventional formal business organisations achieved excellent performances in the yore days with paper as medium of communication and physical convergence to address issues. Keeping to such arrangements in this present age have created challenges due to increase in the cost of business operations and delayed in information dissemination. Contemporary formal business organisations are smart and slim with the adoption of different electronic communication media which get information to destination within jiffy and at minimum cost. Although, electronic communication is associated with high risk and thus requires effective management to prevent hackers, its adoption is however imperative, in this age, to bring about sustainable business operations. This paper addresses the problem of electronic communication as the strength of formal business agility in this globalised time. It recommends that policy on electronic communication management is what contemporary formal business organisations need, instead of sticking to the conventional communication system, which has been overtaken by technological advancement and thus lacks what it takes to make business competitive and agile.

Keywords: Business, Communication, Electronic communication, Formal organisation**Introduction**

Organizational analysts, from time immemorial, have admitted that effectiveness of communication in business organizations directly contributes to its performance, survival and agility (Ganesh, 2012). According to Wróbel (2017), electronic communication has become daily tools to facilitate work in contemporary formal organizations. This has become more imperative with the emergence of complex organizations that operate from remote locations, with stiff competitions, and globalization (Radović-Marković, 2011; Kleinbaum, Stuart & Tushman, 2008). Physical presence of players, in modern organizations, have also become unrealistic due to reasons such as time, cost, availability, distance, pandemic, and war to mention but just a few.

Electronic communication, here in after referred to as *e*-communication, is any form of online communication, transmitted in whatsoever platform, from one end to another. It is expected that this form of communication does not reduce the quality of the information disseminated. A larger percentage of formal business organizations in developed climes have adopted electronic communication to promote their business transactions swiftly. Businesses have recorded improved performance while productivity in the recent have, not only been made possible but also greatly increased, by *e*-communication.

Such organizations use an array of *e*-communication means like computer systems, *e*-mail, fax machine and video conferencing to mention few ways of getting facts and information. All these are engaged for sharing of live conversations, pictures, images, graphics and maps to aid business transactions. These media options have changed job and work culture in formal business organizations in most developed countries. It is against this backdrop that this paper takes an insight into the desirability of the adoption and application of *e*-communication in formal business organizations in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Formal Business Organization

Organization is as old as the existence of human being. Some authors are right to have said that when people come together to achieve more than the sum of individuals put together, organization is already formed (Oshionebo, 2014). This implies that organizations are visible everywhere, from family to tribe, country to race, among others (Etzioni, 1969). Therefore, any form of social grouping could be termed 'organization'. However, according to Asuquo and Bassey (2016), the essence of organization, its composition and nature evolved what is termed 'formal organization' and 'informal organization'. This wide description of organization typology is not totally separable, as formal organization would have informal organization(s) within it (Etor 2016; Asuquo & Bassey, 2016). At times, informal organization has assisted formal organization to achieve its essence of being and gain competitive edge.

Studies have shown that what distinguishes formal organisation from informal organisation is the level of their formality (Keikotlhaie, Ekambaram, Halvorsen & Klakegg, 2015). This take into cognizance some basic features of formal organisation such as existence of rules and regulations, control of membership, mode of communication and the likes (Asuquo & Bassey, 2016; Oshionebo, 2014). This formality differs in context. For instance, family, church and business as organizations differ in their application of this formality. In some families, issues are treated with high sense of formality while others will not. Likewise, in some businesses, issue of formality is not top priority but results. In business, nature of business such as sole business or multinational can be the difference. While it is established that multinational businesses would be more formal because of its complex operations, it is not always like that for sole businesses where issue of formality or corporate governance is not a top priority (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2017).

For business organisation, which Kaul (2012) described as enterprise with economic activities, to produce goods or render services for profit; remaining in business profitably, is a function of some factors, among which changing ways of doing business, has become paramount. One of the areas, in which the change may be desirable, is communication. Electronic communication is making significant transformation in the area of business worldwide presently.

Electronic Communication

The meaning of electronic communication is diverse but simply implies communication with the adoption of electronic media. E-communication, as it is conventionally referred to, is the transmission of information through electronic media such as computer system, voice mail, e-mail, teleconferencing and video call (Wróbel, 2017). According to Tenhiälä and Salvador (2014), *e-communication* is a system used as means of sending or retrieving messages through computer or internet connections. Another definition describes e-communication as any communication that is broadcast, created, sent, forwarded, replied to, transmitted, stored, held, copied, downloaded, displayed, viewed, read, or printed by one or several electronic communication services, including but not limited to email and telephone (Radicati, 2016). This allows for the connectedness of employees regardless of geographical distance or spread, time, culture or language differences, contrary to traditional organizations, where all the employees are assembled in a place and at the same time, in order to operate successfully.

E-communication is always carried out on a platform called 'e-communication systems'. E-communication system is a networked information transmitting technologies with the use of Web 2.0 applications to create, deliver, receive, and retain information. These technologies are increasing day by day with features that make communication easier, faster, safe, easy to store and less costly. Few of these technologies as mentioned by Tenhiälä and Salvador (2014) are reviewed below:

1. **Electronic Mail:** Shortly written as *e-mail*, it is a means of transferring information electronically, using soft or/ and hard forms, with any technological platforms (Radicati, 2016). It is used to convey information between and among employees and management in formal organisation. *E-mail* can be

intranet and extranet. The intranet is an organization's internal electronic means of information system between and among employees of the same organisation (Juholin, 1999). While, extranet is a protracted intranet because it connects employees of an organisation with other outside world such as customers, suppliers, and stakeholders which communication might be desired to be sent to or receive from.

2. **Teleconference:** This is the use of telecommunication to facilitate contacts with stakeholders in organization, that might otherwise be at different locations, to participate in meetings, training sessions and other information seeking activities. It is a video meeting between participants in two or more locations that can be beyond two participants. In other way, it is communication via electronic that involves a group that desire to have a meeting.
3. **Video Conferencing:** Oke and Idiagbon-Oke (2010) described video conferencing as a type of remoteness conferencing, with at least two people or more, visually connect and interact. This e-communication enables business organizations to hold face to face meeting online with people without converging in one particular location. There is different integrated software designed for this purpose to enable different users connect and hold discussions with themselves at the same time. The software like zoom and skype have features that can schedule meetings, chat and vote. These are to the benefits of business organizations.
4. **Social Networking:** Business organizations have also adopted social networking as e-communication. They are websites and applications that enable users to create and share contents on social platforms. This is used to reach a larger audience and can be video or audio interaction. It is also referred to as new electronic communication channel such as podcasts, blogs, chat rooms, wikis, and discussion forums (Williams, 2008). The common ones are Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and My space.
5. **Text Messaging:** This has become one of the most popular e-communicate media in active use. It involves exchanging short messages on mobile phone. It is effective because it does not require internet network on the phone. Text messaging is fast and presentable as evidence in business.

Researches into the areas of electronic communications have revealed that it is imperative to formal business organization's agility, survival and profitability in the following ways.

- i. **Cost:** High cost of paper and printing machines, cost of maintenance, cost of air travel and hotel bookings for meetings have been identified as increasing the running cost of business organizations. For instance, the use of short messaging (SMS) in term of cost cannot be compared with memo dispatch.
- ii. **Timeliness:** The speed with which messages are delivered within wide areas of business units, departments, locations and with other stakeholders is faster with e-communication when compared with conventional means of communication in the past. With e-communication, few seconds is required to communicate (Rainie, Purcell, & Smith, 2011).
- iii. **Ubiquity:** Electronic communication bring together large number of employees in formal organization working together every day (Zuckerberg, 2010). It encourages organizational participants to easily spread and share information at the same time (Madden, 2010).
- iv. **Availability:** With the use of electronic communication, all participants in the organization, are assumed to be readily available for immediate discussion at no special notice (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith & Zickuhr, 2010).

Theoretical Review

Theories like Media Richness, Electronic Propinquity and Social Presence have supported the claim that e-communication promotes formal business organizations. The Media Richness Theory of Daft and Lengel (1984) explains communication media within the context of formal organization as regard its effectiveness. The theory maintains that it is to prevent communication challenges in formal organizations that can affect task performance, result to conflict between and among employees and accelerate business organization goals attainment (Daft & Weick, 1984; Daft & Lengel, 1986). From the theory,

organizational analysts have applied new media communication - e-communication like video and teleconferencing to improve the use of communication in business organizations.

Electronic Propinquity Theory of Korzenny (1978) also articulated the adoption of advanced technologies in communication to bring about effective communication in formal business organizations. According to the theorist, the psychological closeness experienced by communicators, whereas physical closeness or proximity is generally associated with feeling of involvement with others, is fundamental to the success of communication and that of the organization. It was argued that communicators connected through electronic media are not banned from experiencing a sense of closeness otherwise tagged 'electronic propinquity'. The theory promotes mutual directionality, increases propinquity, reduces level of complexity of a task, minimize communication rules and preferred choice of electronic media among users.

The Social Presence Theory of Short, Williams and Christie (1976) tried to show preference for choice of e-communication, based on their features, to the benefit of business organizations. The underlying assumption of the theory is on teleconferencing which suggests that various communication media differ in their capacity. Business organization, as a social entity, requires this social presence to function optimally. Therefore, the preferred e-communication should not lose touch with the fact that, what will create the real situation is to adopt electronic media that will encourage active participation of members in the meetings at a reasonable cost. This is considered germane to business organization's agility, survival and profitability.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies have highlighted some of the facts as reflected by the considered theories. Researches by Jean-Francois *et al.* (2018); Wróbel (2017) and Peng *et al.* (2014) have shown that e-communication is fundamental to formal business organizations as it increases work efficiency, agility, profitability and survival. In the study of Wróbel (2017), email was reported to be the dominant electronic communication tool used by office workers while videoconferencing recorded the least with only 6%. Similarly, Thomas (2013) found that e-mail supports knowledge exchange in organizations. Specifically, e-communication such as video conferencing and web meetings have been found to have impacted greatly on performance.

In another related study conducted by Peng *et al.* (2014), e-communication such as email and groupware were found to promote collaboration between partners in terms of knowledge sharing which, in turn, improved project performance in organizations. Furthermore, the study of Jean-Francois *et al.*, (2018), identified e-communication as the way to go for contemporary workplaces, if productivity and performance is to be achieved at its peak. This implies that e-communication is now part of high performance formal business organizations.

Conclusion

In developed world, formal business organizations have transited from their conventional ways of communication to e-communication, as a result of the need to improve service delivery to customers, through accelerated process, in effective and efficient manner. An insight into e-communication as explored in this paper, established this modern way of communication, as the back bone of organization's survival and agility, depending on the adoption of any of the means of e-communication to further business prosperity. It is important to note that employees, who are the users, must be versatile in the use and must continually acquire training to up-skill themselves of emerging e-communication systems, to better the lots of the organizations. Another dimension to the training of staff is to develop the skills to guide against hackers to organizations' e-communication systems. Knowledgeable staff will be sensitive to what is happening in the information space of the organization and act swiftly on any suspicious observation that can be injurious to the survival of the organization.

Suggestions

Based on the above expositions, the following are recommended:

1. An enduring electronic communication policy should be put in place in every formal business organization which should cover backup of records as well as protection.
2. All employees in organization should always seek approval, from the appropriate authority, before disseminating information via any e-communication platform.
3. Infrastructural supports that are well protected should be put in place to facilitate e-communication use and protect from hackers in organizations.
4. Managing electronic communication system should be considered as an integral part of modern formal business organizations. Therefore, management must device ways through which electronic communication would always be successfully managed.
5. The use of personal devices and e-communication platforms should never be encouraged in business organizations. This is to prevent information theft, hackers and keep data base of all interactions via e-communication.
6. Employees in the organizations should be discouraged from using the electronic platforms for chatting/video during working time as this can result in loss of productivity.

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