

# DIGITAL INTERNAL COMMUNICATION: HOW DIGITAL CHANNEL ACCEPTANCE AFFECTS INTERNAL COMMUNICATION SATISFACTION

## DIGITALNA INTERNA KOMUNIKACIJA: KAKO PRIHVAĆENOST DIGITALNIH KANALA UTJEČE NA ZADOVOLJSTVO INTERNOM KOMUNIKACIJOM



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Preliminary communication

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### Abstract<sup>1</sup>

**Purpose** – This study is aimed at establishing the relationship between digital channels used for internal communication and the level of employee satisfaction with internal communication.

**Design/Methodology/Approach** – The data for this study was collected as part of a diary research method. The participants were asked to record their daily internal communication activities for five days and in the end, they completed a survey that measured their digital channel perception, i.e. acceptance, and overall internal communication satisfaction. To test the data, regression analysis was used.

**Findings and implications** – The study showed that *effort expectancy* was a predictor of satisfaction with *feedback*, *horizontal communication*, *informal communication*, *information about the organization*, and *communication climate*, while *facilitating conditions* was a predictor of satisfaction with the communication climate

### Sažetak

**Svrha** Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je utvrditi odnos između digitalnih kanala koji se koriste za internu komunikaciju i razine zadovoljstva internom komunikacijom.

**Metodološki pristup** Podaci za istraživanje prikupljeni su kao dio istraživanja metodom dnevnika. Sudionici su zamoljeni da zabilježe svoje dnevne komunikacijske aktivnosti tijekom pet dana, a na kraju su ispunili upitnik koji je mjerio njihovu percepciju, odnosno prihvaćenost digitalnih kanala i ukupno zadovoljstvo internom komunikacijom. Za testiranje podataka korištena je regresijska analiza.

**Rezultati i implikacije** Istraživanje je pokazalo da očekivani napor predstavlja prediktor zadovoljstva povratnim informacijama, horizontalnom komunikacijom, neformalnom komunikacijom, informacijama o organizaciji i komunikacijskom klimom, dok su olakšavajući uvjeti prediktor zadovoljstva komunikacijskom klimom i kvalitetom komunikacijskih medija. Digitalni kanali i način na koji se koriste u internoj komunikaciji utječu na percepciju komunikacijskih praksi. Kako bi osigurale zadovoljstvo zaposlenika, organizacije bi se trebale pobri-

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and *quality of communication media*. Digital channels and the way they are used for internal communication impact the perception of internal communication practices. To ensure employee satisfaction, organizations should make sure that they adequately support them. It is crucial for internal communication practitioners to choose digital channels that enrich their internal communication strategy, adhere to their employees' preferences, and *capabilities*.

**Limitation** – Data used in the study is cross-sectional, so causality cannot be proven, and the results are susceptible to biases. Additionally, the sample was small, meaning that the interpretation of significance had to be carefully made. Hence, generalization of the results is not advisable.

**Originality** – This study explored the relationship between digital channel acceptance, a concept based on technology acceptance, and applied it to the field of internal communication.

**Keywords:** digital communication, internal communication, digital internal channels, channel perception, digital channel acceptance

nuti da ih adekvatno podrže. Ključno je da stručnjaci za internu komunikaciju odaberu digitalne kanale koji obogaćuju njihovu strategiju interne komunikacije uzimajući u obzir preferencije i mogućnosti zaposlenika.

**Ograničenja** Korišteni podaci su transverzalnog tipa, što znači da se ne može dokazati uzročnost, a rezultati su podložni pristranostima. Osim toga, uzorak je bio malen pa je razina značajnosti pri interpretaciji rezultata bila prilagođena veličini uzorka. Također, zbog toga generalizacija rezultata nije preporučljiva.

**Doprinos** Prihvaćanje digitalnih kanala, koncept koji se temelji na modelu prihvaćanja tehnologije, primijenjen je na područje digitalne interne komunikacije.

**Ključne riječi:** digitalna komunikacija, interna komunikacija, digitalni kanali interne komunikacije, percepcija kanala, prihvaćenost digitalnih kanala

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Internal communication is one of the determinants of organizational success. For example, efficient internal communication has shown connections to greater financial success, higher engagement and productivity, larger market share, and even customer satisfaction (Yates, 2006). It also positively affects overall life satisfaction (Sinčić Ćorić et al., 2020). Considering these significant influences internal communication has on organizational success and employees, increasing interest in studying all things related is to be expected.

Recently a new topic of interest has emerged, in part stemming from changes faced by businesses due to COVID-19 (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021) and in part due to digital transformation that has been happening for a while (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2023). Digital channels used for internal communication are increasingly being studied, and rightfully so. Organizations are increasingly using digital channels to communicate with their employees and to facilitate communication among them. This is especially important since the percentage of employees who work remotely is rising each year and is approaching 30% (Statista, 2025).

Digital internal communication channels foster both employee-organization relationships and employee-employee relationships (Wuersch et al., 2023). The fact that digital channels can help engage employees (Bui, 2019) is a matter of ongoing concern for many organizations that is gaining even more emphasis with employees who prefer work-from-home and hybrid modes of work. The importance of digital channels in internal communication is clear; however, their impact is not. All channels should be in line with employee preferences. When introducing digital channels, great attention should be paid to employees' abilities (i.e., computer literacy) and needs, because not all employees will adapt to all digital channels equally (Sisko Maarit Lipiäinen et al., 2014). The question is, how do digital channels affect internal communication

and employee satisfaction with it? This study is aimed at establishing the relationship between digital channels being used for internal communication and the level of employee satisfaction with internal communication to determine the effects of digital channels on internal communication practices.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Internal communication

Internal communication consists of all formal and informal communication within an organization (Kandlousi et al., 2010). Its aim is to inform, motivate, and engage employees (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2023), build, and maintain relationships (Men & Stacks, 2014) and create strong employer brands (Špoljarić & Tkalac Verčič, 2022). This communication takes place at all organizational levels (Kalla, 2005). It enables communication among and with employees by allowing exploration, interpretation, sharing, and acting (Mazzei, 2014). Internal communication greatly impacts employee perception of their employer (Špoljarić, 2023), which in turn improves numerous organizational outcomes, helps create competitive advantage, and even increases customer satisfaction (Backhaus & Tikoo, 2004; Heilmann et al., 2013). The most important role of internal communication is to create and manage the employee-organizational relationship (Tkalac Verčič, 2016), making it one of the essential elements of employee management (Quirke, 2008).

#### 2.1.1. Internal communication channels

To communicate with their employees, organizations use numerous channels. Some internal communication channels are used as a means of enabling communication among employees, while others are used to establish top-down communication. These channels are often categorized differently; however, the most common is the categorization into "traditional" or print, and digital channels (Špoljarić, 2023).

Choosing the right internal communication channel mix could be considered one of the most important internal communication management decisions. There is simply no “one-size-fits-all” solution. At the same time, effectiveness of internal communication depends on whether a relevant message has been sent through appropriate channel (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020). This decision can be affected by numerous factors, such as organizational profile and size, cultural background, and other demographic characteristics (Dévényi, 2016; FitzPatrick & Valskov, 2014). When considering formal and informal channels, in terms of employer image and brand perception, they have an equal level of influence. Both formal and informal channels work together to build the relationship between employees and the organization (First & Tomić, 2011). To achieve the ideal brand perception, organizations need to consider what their employees desire when choosing internal communication channels. Both employee attitudes and behavior are affected by this choice (Braun et al., 2015). Right channel choices have been even more emphasized in recent years since numerous organizations have changed their mode of work, allowing their employees to work from home. The effectiveness of internal communication depends on the combination of content and channel through which it is disseminated (Tkalac Verčič, et al., 2024).

## 2.2. Digital communication and digital channels

Communication greatly contributes to organizations; it helps achieve organizational goals and build relationships with an organization's most valuable audiences. Even though the process of digitalization has been ongoing ever since digital channels became available, it has gained significant traction in recent years because of the COVID-19 pandemic (DeFilippis et al., 2022). Communication activities and processes have been adjusting and developing rapidly, reflecting all the changes in technology. Recent advances in digitalization of internal communication have

brought forth completely new channels, such as social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) that boost collaborative projects and establish virtual communities (Sisko Maarit Lipiäinen et al., 2014), both of which are important for relationship management. Digital transformation and such channels have blurred the lines between internal and external organizational environments, prompting employees to become organizational ambassadors (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2023). Internal social networks improve brand identification and understanding of organizational values (Anderson, 2019), aiding this important role employees are starting to embrace.

Significant changes in communication have been reported, supporting the notion that digital forms of communication have advanced in terms of frequency and quality (DeFilippis et al., 2022). However, many studies still emphasize the importance of face-to-face communication as a necessary form of communication for employee satisfaction (e.g. Friedl & Tkalac Verčič, 2011; Sisko Maarit Lipiäinen et al., 2014). This highlights the role of understanding employee preferences, which should be at the center of digital communication strategy.

## 2.3. Channel perception and acceptance

As Sisko Maarit Lipiäinen et al. (2014) deduced, “the effectiveness of communication depends on both the sender's and receiver's familiarity with particular communication medium codes and conventions” (p. 277-278). This is determined by an individual's channel perception, which affects their channel acceptance.

Perception, in marketing context, “is the awareness or understanding of sensory information” (Krishna, 2011, p. 334). When it comes to communication channels, perception of them is affected by how well established and trustworthy they are, which environment communication occurs in, and all other individual attributes of each channel. One study, for example, found that digital channels are usually perceived as

being speedy and efficient (Danaher & Rossiter, 2011). Consequently, digital communication is frequently perceived as urgent. The same study established the difference between work and home environments and preferred channels in the two settings. The only issue concerns the blurred lines between organizational environments and modes of work that exist nowadays.

In comes channel acceptance. The choice of channels has been studied through several different theories, such as media richness theory and social presence theory. However, a media features approach focuses on functionality, usability, and ease of use (El-Shinnawy & Markus, 1998). Functionality describes the level of accuracy and comprehensiveness a channel allows; usability refers to the format of the content channel allows; and ease of use is the effort an individual needs to put in to use the channel. These characteristics, as well as the individual's personal skills and organizational support and influence, describe the level of the individual's channel acceptance based on the technology acceptance model (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024a).

An individual's positive perception of a specific channel, combined with a higher level of usage, will result in higher communication satisfaction. Digital channels are being increasingly used in internal communication practices, and they affect employee satisfaction. However, these effects are yet to be determined. To determine how digital internal communication channels are perceived and how internal communication practices are affected by them, the following research questions are proposed:

RQ: How do digital channels affect internal communication?

RQa: How does digital channel acceptance affect internal communication satisfaction?

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was collected as part of an international research project examining

internal communication in digital context and its impact on employees. While the aim of the project as a whole is to establish the relationship between digital internal communication, employee engagement, and perceived life satisfaction, this study is focused on digital channels and their contribution to internal communication practices. Therefore, the data for this study was collected in April of 2024 as part of a diary research method. The participants were asked to record their daily internal communication activities for five days, at the end of which they completed a survey that measured their digital channel acceptance and overall internal communication satisfaction. The data was collected through an online survey panel conducted in Slovenia. The aim was to reach respondents from various industries and backgrounds who have a full- or part-time job and use digital channels for internal communication; therefore, respondents from all over the country were included. Their task was to report on their communication experiences throughout the day, as well as give an overall level of internal communication satisfaction and provide input on how they perceive digital channels.

#### 3.1. Participants

A total of 104 participants completed the survey. However, due to inconsistencies and irregularities within the data, data from eight participants was removed, leaving 96 participants (Table 1). All of them used digital channels for communication at work, which was a requirement for participating in the study. Most of them worked from their office (79), 16 had a hybrid work environment and only one worked from home. Just over a half of the participants were male (54), and 42 were female. The youngest participant was 23 at the time data was collected and the oldest was 63. The average age of the participants was 43.43 years old and their median age was 44. Forty of them had a master's degree, 23 had completed higher vocational education, 25 high-school level education, six of them had a

master of science degree, with one participant holding bachelor's degree, and one a PhD.

TABLE 1: Sample demographics (N = 96)

	Number of participants	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	42	43.8
Female	54	56.3
<b>Age group</b>		
23-30	10	10.4
31-40	31	32.3
41-50	26	27.1
51-60	26	27.1
>60	3	3.1
<b>Mode of work</b>		
From the office	79	82.3
From home	1	1.0
Hybrid	16	16.7
<b>Education level</b>		
High school education	20	26.0
Higher vocational education	23	24.0
Bachelor's degree	1	1.0
Master's degree	40	41.7
Master of science	6	6.3
PhD	1	1.0

Source: Author's own research.

### 3.2. Measures

Internal communication satisfaction (ICS) was measured using a validated scale developed by Tkalac Verčič et al. (2009). The scale measures internal communication satisfaction with 32 items factoring into eight dimensions. Each of them measures satisfaction with a different aspect of internal communication. *Satisfaction with feedback* includes satisfaction with information about the performance and importance of work, the consequences of poor work performance, and contribution to organizational success. *Satisfaction with communication with the immediate superior* includes satisfaction with

the availability of the superior, their familiarity, and understanding of problems at work, as well as recognition of the employee's potential. *Satisfaction with horizontal communication* includes the availability of colleagues, the success and results of communication with colleagues, and their willingness to receive criticism. *Satisfaction with informal communication* includes the usefulness and importance of informal communication, the amount of time spent informally communicating, and the amount of gossip. *Satisfaction with information about the organization* includes satisfaction with the amount and availability of information related to the organization's performance, work rules, changes within the organization, and regulations that affect the organization's business. *Satisfaction with the communication climate* includes satisfaction with the contribution that communication in the organization has in accepting and identifying with the organizational culture. *Satisfaction with the quality of communication media* includes satisfaction with the different channels that are available for use and that are chosen for communication in the organization. The last dimension, *satisfaction with communication in meetings*, includes satisfaction with the information shared at meetings, their duration, and quality.

Digital channel perception was measured using a digital channel acceptance scale (DICAS) developed by Tkalac Verčič et al. (2024a). DICAS consists of 24 items that form six dimensions. Each of them measures different aspects of digital channel perception in the context of internal communication. *Interaction facilitation* refers to the benefits digital channels provide, such as communication effectiveness and efficiency. *Apprehension* measures privacy levels and data security concerns any employees might have. Their personal skills that are useful for and affect digital channel usage are reflected in *effort expectancy*. *Performance expectancy* measures the level of perceived usefulness. The level of support within the organization is assessed by *facilitating conditions*. The last dimension, *social*

TABLE 2: Means, standard deviations, Cronbah's alpha coefficients, and Pearson correlations between the variables used in the study

	M	SD	α	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.
1. SwF	5.02	0.997	.863	1													
2. SwIS	5.10	1.036	.866	.750**	1												
3. SwHC	5.13	0.970	.877	.810**	.834**	1											
4.SwIC	5.22	0.923	.906	.752**	.762**	.785**	1										
5. SwIO	4.73	1.210	.892	.831**	.739**	.820**	.730**	1									
6. SwCC	5.08	1.278	.802	.741**	.811**	.813**	.658**	.718**	1								
7. SwQM	4.96	1.179	.735	.746**	.833**	.847**	.838**	.790**	.779**	1							
8. SwCM	5.02	1.219	.742	.804**	.899**	.887**	.796**	.799**	.847**	.912**	1						
9. IF	5.60	1.032	.734	.406**	.421**	.443**	.548**	.410**	.329**	.524**	.424**	1					
10. A	4.47	1.399	.788	0.181	0.150	0.135	.216*	0.112	0.148	0.155	0.147	.299**	1				
11. EE	5.69	0.912	.779	.498**	.469**	.521**	.616**	.468**	.445**	.542**	.507**	.648**	.282**	1			
12. PE	5.67	1.115	.853	.483**	.502**	.498**	.613**	.450**	.364**	.585**	.510**	.789**	.218*	.680**	1		
13. FC	5.22	1.315	.828	.414**	.515**	.485**	.597**	.444**	.428**	.584**	.530**	.633**	0.169	.655**	.694**	1	
14. SI	5.27	1.139	.854	.366**	.423**	.381**	.544**	.330**	.260*	.496**	.474**	.515**	0.058	.564**	.624**	.668**	1

Source: Author's own research. Note: SwF = satisfaction with feedback; SwIS = satisfaction with communication with the immediate superior; SwHC = satisfaction with horizontal communication; SwIC = satisfaction with informal communication; SwIO = satisfaction with information about organization, SwCC = satisfaction with the communication climate; SwQM = satisfaction with the quality of communication media; SwCM = satisfaction with communication in meetings; IF = interaction facilitation; A = apprehension; EE = effort expectancy; PE = performance expectancy; FC = facilitating conditions; SI = social influence.



*influence*, quantifies the influence colleagues and superiors have on the individual's digital channel usage.

## 4. RESULTS

To test the data, regression analysis was used. First, scale reliability was determined using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for ICS was 0.969 and for DICAS 0.901, making both scales reliable and adequate for further analysis (Nunnally, 1978). All the variables used had a mean from 4.47 (*apprehension*) to 5.69 (*effort expectancy*). Almost all the variables are positively and significantly related to each other, except for *apprehension* and the following: *satisfaction with communication with the immediate superior*; *satisfaction with horizontal communication*; *satisfaction with information about the organization*; *satisfaction with the communication climate*; *satisfaction with the quality of communication media*; *satisfaction with communication in meetings*; *facilitating conditions*; *social influence*. All the means, standard deviations, reliabilities, and intercorrelations between the variables used in the study are shown in Table 2.

Multiple regression was conducted to determine how digital channel acceptance and perception impact the level of internal communication satisfaction, and consequently, internal communication practices. IBM SPSS Statistics 25 was used. The assumptions of normality of residuals, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity were satisfied, with no outliers identified.

As shown in Table 3, eight multiple regression analyses were conducted. In each of them a different dimension of ICS was a dependent variable, while six dimensions of DICAS were independent variables. Considering the sample size, significance level was at 10% ( $p < 0.1$ ). *Effort expectancy* was a positive and significant predictor of five ICS dimensions and *facilitating conditions* was a positive and significant predictor of two ICS dimensions. The rest of the DICAS dimensions were not a significant predictor of

any ICS dimensions. It should also be noted that two ICS dimensions – *satisfaction with communication with the immediate superior* and *satisfaction with communication in meetings* – did not have any significant predictors.

The main goal of this study was to determine how digital channels affect internal communication. To do so, multiple regression analysis was conducted, testing digital channel acceptance as a potential antecedent of internal communication satisfaction. The results showed that *effort expectancy* was a significant and positive predictor of *satisfaction with feedback*; *satisfaction with horizontal communication*; *satisfaction with informal communication*; *satisfaction with the information about the organization*; and *satisfaction with the communication climate*. *Facilitating conditions* were a significant and positive predictor of *satisfaction with the communication climate* and *satisfaction with the quality of communication media*. None of the DICAS dimensions were a significant predictor of *satisfaction with communication with the immediate superior* or *satisfaction with communication in meetings*. At the same time, *interaction facilitation*, *apprehension*, *performance expectancy*, and *social influence* were not a significant predictor of any ICS dimension.

*Effort expectancy* measures the impact personal skills have on digital channel acceptance. For example, this dimension reflects if an individual easily adopts and learns how to use digital channels, and how easy it is for them to become a skillful user. It significantly and positively affects *satisfaction with feedback*. *Satisfaction with horizontal communication* and *satisfaction with informal communication* were also predicted by *effort expectancy*. While these two ICS dimensions reflect different aspects of internal communication, they are highly correlated. Horizontal communication refers to communication among team members and other same-level colleagues, while informal communication refers to communication among colleagues that is not managed and controlled. *Effort expectancy* also determined *satisfaction with information*



TABLE 3: Multiple regression analysis testing how digital channel perception impacts internal communication

DV	IV	B	SD (B)	$\beta$	t	p (t)
SwF R <sup>2</sup> =.290	IF	-.044	.149	-.046	-.296	.768
	A	.033	.068	.047	.486	.628
	<b>EE</b>	<b>.319</b>	<b>.148</b>	<b>.292</b>	<b>2.155</b>	<b>.034</b>
	PE	.235	.151	.262	1.559	.122
	FC	.030	.109	.040	.277	.783
	SI	.028	.112	.032	.249	.804
SwIS R <sup>2</sup> =.319	IF	-0.047	0.151	-0.047	-0.311	0.757
	A	0.022	0.069	0.029	0.312	0.755
	EE	0.158	0.151	0.139	1.046	0.299
	PE	0.211	0.153	0.227	1.376	0.172
	FC	0.200	0.111	0.254	1.806	0.074
	SI	0.051	0.114	0.056	0.448	0.655
SwHC R <sup>2</sup> =.323	IF	0.016	0.141	0.017	0.111	0.912
	A	-0.013	0.065	-0.019	-0.207	0.837
	<b>EE</b>	<b>0.304</b>	<b>0.141</b>	<b>0.286</b>	<b>2.158</b>	<b>0.034</b>
	PE	0.162	0.143	0.186	1.132	0.261
	FC	0.129	0.103	0.175	1.250	0.214
	SI	-0.018	0.107	-0.021	-0.165	0.869
SwIC R <sup>2</sup> =.486	IF	0.031	0.126	0.032	0.243	0.809
	A	0.039	0.058	0.055	0.68	0.499
	<b>EE</b>	<b>0.279</b>	<b>0.126</b>	<b>0.256</b>	<b>2.219</b>	<b>0.029</b>
	PE	0.173	0.128	0.194	1.352	0.180
	FC	0.126	0.092	0.166	1.362	0.176
	SI	0.129	0.095	0.148	1.354	0.179
SwIO R <sup>2</sup> =.267	IF	0.055	0.183	0.047	0.298	0.767
	A	-0.030	0.084	-0.034	-0.353	0.725
	<b>EE</b>	<b>0.334</b>	<b>0.183</b>	<b>0.252</b>	<b>1.828</b>	<b>0.071</b>
	PE	0.169	0.186	0.156	0.911	0.365
	FC	0.168	0.134	0.183	1.255	0.213
	SI	-0.057	0.138	-0.054	-0.415	0.679
SwCC R <sup>2</sup> =.239	IF	-0.054	0.197	-0.043	-0.272	0.786
	A	0.018	0.091	0.020	0.201	0.841
	<b>EE</b>	<b>0.424</b>	<b>0.197</b>	<b>0.302</b>	<b>2.156</b>	<b>0.034</b>
	PE	0.070	0.200	0.061	0.352	0.726
	<b>FC</b>	<b>0.286</b>	<b>0.144</b>	<b>0.295</b>	<b>1.984</b>	<b>0.050</b>
	SI	-0.140	0.149	-0.124	-0.938	0.351
SwQM R <sup>2</sup> =.422	IF	0.071	0.159	0.062	0.445	0.657
	A	0.002	0.073	0.002	0.024	0.981
	EE	0.193	0.158	0.149	1.221	0.225
	PE	0.226	0.161	0.213	1.406	0.163
	<b>FC</b>	<b>0.216</b>	<b>0.116</b>	<b>0.241</b>	<b>1.859</b>	<b>0.066</b>
	SI	0.089	0.120	0.086	0.745	0.458
SwCM R <sup>2</sup> =.350	IF	-0.080	0.174	-0.068	-0.463	0.645
	A	0.022	0.080	0.025	0.276	0.783
	EE	0.262	0.173	0.196	1.512	0.134
	PE	0.208	0.176	0.190	1.180	0.241
	FC	0.205	0.127	0.222	1.615	0.110
	SI	0.139	0.131	0.130	1.060	0.292

Source: author's own research. Note: For abbreviations, see Table 2.

about the organization. The only ICS dimension that was predicted by two DICAS dimensions, *effort expectancy* and *facilitating conditions*, was *satisfaction with the communication climate*. *Facilitating conditions* is a dimension that highly reflects organizational culture and climate. This dimension also predicted *satisfaction with the quality of communication media*. For employees to perceive channels they have available as quality channels, they need to feel supported in using them. *Facilitating conditions* reflects whether there are people who give support when employees face difficulties using digital channels, as well as technical resources necessary for using certain channels (e.g., good wi-fi signal for using online channels). *Satisfaction with communication with the immediate superior* and *satisfaction with communication in meetings* were the only two ICS dimensions not predicted by any of the DICAS dimensions.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to show how digital channels and employees' attitudes towards them affect their perception of internal communication. The results suggest that certain attitudes towards digital channels do, in fact, have an impact on different parts of internal communication. It should be noted that, while internal communication includes both digital and non-digital communication, digital internal communication has been gaining more importance since work-from-home and hybrid work have been introduced more commonly on account of the COVID-19 pandemic (Pakozdi et al., 2021). Results of this study showcased the importance of personal skills and organizational support, both regarding digital channels, for internal communication satisfaction. This means that employees who are more inclined to use digital channels and employees whose organizations offer resources to make digital channel usage more effortless will report higher levels of internal communication satisfaction.

Even though it was somewhat surprising, the results showed personal skills necessary for using digital channels affect how employees perceive feedback. Previous research showed that, generally, employees prefer to receive feedback face-to-face (Sisko Maarit Lipiäinen et al., 2014). This sort of communication reduces ambiguity and misunderstandings, which is crucial when giving feedback, especially negative. However, what this study does not take into account is the type of digital channels that are used for giving feedback. The research conducted by Sisko Maarit Lipiäinen et al. (2014) focused on emails, establishing that feedback was not provided efficiently enough. Emails create distance and a certain lack of empathy, which is what makes them an inappropriate channel for giving feedback. If feedback is given through a video call, however, these issues can be surpassed. Similar discrepancy when it comes to results regarding feedback were reported previously (Špoljarić, 2023). This research study found that employees were most satisfied with negative feedback, which is opposite to what was established by prior research. Cultural differences were reported as a possible cause; however, taking into consideration these two discrepancies, it is possible that employees from both studies rarely receive negative feedback. This may affect their satisfaction with feedback, which is relatively high, because for them feedback does not involve any criticism. It could also mean that digital channels are an appropriate means for giving feedback since employees do not require additional factors involved in face-to-face communication, such as body language cues, sense of closeness, and higher empathy levels. This result may also mean that the employees who are generally inclined to use digital channels will also be inclined to receive any type of feedback digitally because they have a better understanding of digital communication and are able to fill in any non-verbal social cues themselves.

Horizontal and informal communication enable and encourage relationship building. They have strong influence on social relationships and

organizational culture. Digital channels, and especially internal social media, are known to facilitate and enable social relationships. They help organizations build relationships with their employees (Wang, 2023), while also helping employees form relationships (and even friendships) with each other (Standlee, 2019). Social relationships within an organization form a major part of organizational culture and drive more successful communication among peers. If there is any lack of formal top-down information, horizontal and informal communication allow employees to fill in any gaps that might have been created. Digital channels play a huge role in that, with an emphasis on internal social media and instant messaging apps, enabling employees to form virtual communities. Employees who are prone to using digital channels, i.e. those who do not have to invest a lot of additional effort into using these channels, will be sure to form relationships with much more ease because digital communication will come naturally to them. These employees are more likely to participate in digital horizontal and informal communication, meaning that they are also more likely to be a part of a virtual community. Virtual communities not only facilitate social relationships at work but also improve collaboration and professional development (McLoughlin et al., 2018). All of this, in turn, increases employee communication satisfaction.

One of the most efficient and common ways to share information about organization (such as any changes within the organization, financial success, information on rules and procedures, etc.) is via the Intranet (Scott, 1998). It is to be expected that employees who are prone to using digital channels, including the Intranet, will therefore be more satisfied with information about the organization they work for, that is, corporate information. Since this kind of information usually concerns all employees, digital channels easily available to everyone, such as the Intranet, are also the best way of sharing such information. Organizational willingness to provide support for digital channels is a

consequence of higher organizational support in general. It is not surprising that *facilitating conditions*, reflecting organizational climate, will have a significant impact on the organizational communication climate, which is a part of it. Communication climate also, in part, reflects social relationships. It determines organizational commitment and identification. Similarly to horizontal communication and informal communication, employees who are more prone to digital channels are also more likely to identify with the organization and feel a higher level of commitment, reflecting certain parts of social relationships within the organization. This, in turn, will increase their *satisfaction with the communication climate*. Organizational climate also has an impact on perceived channel quality, which was to be expected. Organizational support, which affects the climate, can encourage employees to use digital channels. If they feel supported and encouraged to use digital channels and have technical resources to do so, they will perceive the quality of those channels to be higher and, in turn, will most likely report higher satisfaction with them and their quality, as was the case in this study.

Considering the employees who report to have higher levels of face-to-face interactions with their superiors while also wishing for even more (Braun et al., 2015; Men, 2014), it is to be expected that their digital channel acceptance does not influence their *satisfaction with communication with the immediate superior*. Neither is the quantity of digital communication with supervisors high, nor do employees want it. At the same time, digital channel acceptance has no impact on their perception of communication in meetings. This result may have several different causes. First, ICS items do not explicitly refer to meetings held via digital channels, so participants may have differentiated between in person and online meetings, meaning that digital communication is not reflected in their *satisfaction with communication in meetings*. Second, meetings are mostly mandatory and have an agenda, whether taking place in person or

online. This means that, even when meetings are held online using digital channels, it is not a choice made by the employees but rather their superiors, and the level of digital channel acceptance simply does not affect chosen media channel.

Digital channels and the way in which they are used for internal communication affect the perception of internal communication practices. To ensure employee satisfaction, organizations should make sure that they support them adequately. This may include training, education, and enablement of digital communication within the organization. When choosing which channels to include in their internal communication mix, organizations really need to consider their employees and their preferences (Tkalac Verčič & Špoljarić, 2020). Even though they may provide support and resources necessary for digital channels, this is still not enough to ensure satisfaction. Digital channels are an appropriate choice for the organizations whose employees have personal skills necessary to properly use them, so they do not require additional effort, such as self-education, help of others (specifically, those who are not responsible for helping with such channels), new equipment not provided by the organization, and so on.

Internal communication has faced several challenges due to its digitalization (Tkalac Verčič et al., 2024b). While developing their strategic approach to internal communication practices for their organizations, communication experts need to consider an increasing number of elements on an almost daily basis. Channel preferences have been a topic of interest for quite some time (Friedl & Tkalac Verčič, 2011) given that the right channel to deliver the message has an impact on its reach, perception, and acceptance. What is communicated, how it is communicated, and when it is communicated influences employees and the way they see their employers. Internal communication

messages and channels through which they are shared directly relate to the level of employee satisfaction with internal communication. Introducing digital channels into the internal communication mix had been a choice until the COVID-19 pandemic; for the last five years, however, it has become a necessity. It is, therefore, crucial for internal communication practitioners to choose digital channels that enrich their internal communication strategy, adhering to their employees' preferences, *and capabilities*, while at the same time conveying the message as it is intended.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE STUDIES

The data used in this research is considered cross-sectional. Certain limitations come from using cross-sectional data. These types of studies analyze data collected at a single point in time, from the same participant. Firstly, this type of data cannot be used to prove causality while also being susceptible to biases, and even some identified relationships might be questionable (Wang & Cheng, 2020). That is why researchers should be very careful with its interpretation. Additionally, the data was collected as part of a diary method survey. This meant the sample was fairly small, so significance had to be carefully interpreted. Also, the sample size makes generalization of the results difficult, no matter how representative it is.

Future research should focus on further validation of the scales that were used, as well as on a sample that would help with results generalization, that is, seeking to secure a bigger sample. Further studies should also be aimed at collecting data appropriate for use in structural equation modeling and similar methods that help determine causality. Cross-sectional studies ought to be avoided.

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