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Effects of Communication Strategies on Small and Medium Enterprises Performance in Akure Metropolis

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Abstract

The study examines the effects of communication strategies on SMEs performance in Akure metropolis. However, the specific objectives are to determine the relationship between audio/telephone communication strategies; examine the effects of face-to-face meeting communication strategy and assess the effect of email communication strategy on SMEs performance in Akure metropolis. The owners and managers of all small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Akure city make up the study's target group. Consequently, there are 535 owners and managers of SMEs in total (Source: Ondo State's Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency). The sample size for the study was 229 respondents. The method of data employed both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data gathered for this investigation. Frequency tables and percentages were used to analyze the responses and demographic characteristics of the respondents. The result showed that audio/telephone p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$, Face-to-face meetings $p = 0.000 < 0.05$ and email communication approach p-value of $0.000 < 0.05$. The study affirmed that there is significant effect of communication strategies on SMEs performance in Akure metropolis. The study concluded that SMEs could boost teamwork and operational efficiency by swiftly addressing internal problems through the use of audio and telephone communication. In-person meetings are essential for efficient communication in the workplace, and frequent in-person meetings improve teamwork and productivity for promptly addressing disputes and misunderstandings. Email communication strategy improves internal communication effectiveness and speeds up organisational decision-making.

Keywords: communication strategies, decision-making, efficient communication, performent, small and medium enterprises

1. Introduction

It is impossible to overstate the importance of Small and Medium Businesses (SMEs) to the sustainability of the continental economy. These businesses are how people can escape underdevelopment and unemployment. It was projected that 97% of Nigerian enterprises are SMEs, despite the fact that South Africa and Nigeria have the two biggest economies on the continent (Magaji, Baba, & Entebang, 2017). 91% of South African formal businesses are SMEs, according to Perera and Chand (2015), and they are thought to contribute between 50% and 60% of the country's GDP (Ajibade, 2018). The literature has recognized that communication is still an essential instrument for carrying out our daily tasks (Okwuagwu, Nnoje, Onoh & Ikpezie, 2017). The human activity that binds individuals together and forges relationships is communication. This suggests that communication is how people relate to one another. In an organization, it serves as the glue that holds everyone together. Everyone must talk to those around them in order to share their experiences, occupations, frustrations, childhood hopes, and anxieties. Relationship building and interaction with interested external publics as well as internal organizational members are major components of organizational communication.

Burley (2018) reiterates this, stating that results-oriented communication is typically perceived as focusing solely on the business and ignoring the people who are carrying out the task. In order for messages to have the most impact, they must be conveyed several times in various ways, according to Downs and Adrian (2012). According to Sanina, Balashov, Rubtcova, and Satinsky (2017), different parties associated with an organization have distinct communication needs and preferences; as a result, different messages require different delivery methods and channels. Efficiency in integrating several channels and coherence and consistency of multi-voiced communications are essential components of a multi-channeled communication strategy. However, this approach has been criticized for causing the issue of channel switching, which limits the amount of information that can be processed, and because there is no concrete evidence that multiple-channel communications are any more efficient than single-channel inputs (Jonassen and Driscoll, 2013). Additionally, Nagy (2012) contends that as every communication channel is unique, a new approach to message composition is required for each one. It is also challenging to incorporate them into a single communication thread, which results in additional communication expenses.

The problem is that most companies' performance suffers because there is a lack of effective communication between the different tiers of management. On top of that, any group's members can communicate with one another by transferring and understanding meaning (Okwuagwu, Nnoje, Onoh & Ikpezie, 2017). According to Black (2010), stakeholders are considered to have been effectively communicated with when they are provided with accurate and pertinent information in a timely manner, all while keeping costs to a minimum. In addition, they pick up on the fact that our messages should be straightforward and easy to replicate, and that soliciting feedback is an important way to gauge reception. The effectiveness of communication, according to Muszyńska (2018), depends on the receiver accurately understanding the provided information at the right time. Okwuagwu, Onoh, and Nnoje (2017) did find several constraints when they attempted to improve organisational performance via better communication. Productivity and performance in the workplace could be negatively impacted by these constraints. Timeliness, accuracy, specificity, and active listening are all components of good communication; so, it is necessary to investigate their impact on the business performance of SMEs and Wolday (2006), Mesfin (2015), Admasu (2012), Tsega (2014), Mohamed (2016), and Dechasa (2017) have studied the topic of factors affecting the success of MESs in Ethiopia. However, no study has integrated a communication strategy and used an econometric model to test these factors. In light of that, the purpose of this research is to analyze how different communication tactics in Akure metropolitan affect the efficiency and productivity of SMEs.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Communication Strategies

The process of conveying ideas and information from one person to another via the use of a shared system of signs, symbols, or behaviours is known as communication. Verbal and nonverbal communications are both possible. Body language, facial expressions, posture, and the amount of space between people are all examples of non-verbal cues that contribute to productive interactions at work. Another aspect of social interaction that non-verbal communication can be seen as is the transmission of emotions. Nonverbal cues, which comprise indications about our senses, emotions, and thoughts about other people, make up between 65 and 75 percent of most conversation (Schwartz, 2012). The act of conveying ideas and information from one person to another using spoken language is known as verbal communication. These are two forms of communication that have long been used in business settings: the other being non-verbal communication. Flowing formally through an organization's hierarchy, communication follows predetermined rules and protocols. Academics and scholars agree that communication is essential for any business or organization. Without it, no one can share ideas, information, plans, proposals, decisions, or even conduct sales or fulfill customer orders. An organization's once-organized activities revert to their former state of disarray the moment communication breaks down. As a result, the lifeblood of each organization is its communication strategy. "The transmission and reception of ideas, feelings and attitudes verbally or non-verbally to produce a favourable response" is how Blalock (2005) defines communication. "The process by which information is exchanged and understood by two or more people usually with the intention to motivate influence behaviour" is how Draft (2000) describes communication.

2.2 Dimension of Communication Strategies

(a) Audio and Telephone Communication Strategy

Although face-to-face communication is the most valuable strategy in media richness theory, new research indicates that email is more effective at transmitting and receiving management information, making the telephone obsolete, according to Salmon and Joiner (2005). Telephones are not an appropriate medium for ambiguous communication when one party "refuses to answer the phone," as pointed out by Salmon and Joiner (2005). When it comes to internal business communications, the telephone ranks high. One of the most popular ways to materialize both internal and external messages is through the use of the phone, even though other kinds of communication, like email, are increasingly replacing it. In business, it plays a crucial role as the initial point of contact for both the organization and its customers. To set up an interview or clarify any subject, it is customary to call first before making any personal contact. Based on their impressions after this initial phone conversation, the other party will develop an opinion about the company. Following correct method when conversing on the phone is critical for achieving our goals, whether we are the one doing the talking or the one receiving the call. This is true not only in the corporate world, but in all walks of life. The fact that participants in a telephone conversation cannot see one another is a huge plus when trying to resolve contentious or otherwise unpleasant business matters. Due to the lack of visual cues, well-prepared arguments presented over the phone have a better chance of convincing the opposing party. One more perk of this mode of communication is that we can multitask as we talk, which means we can take notes, look something up on the internet, ask a coworker a question (within reason of course), etc. To make the most of this business communication tool, it is vital to adopt suitable telephone strategies. Telephones and other communication equipment have developed and improved over the years, opening new markets and increasing their usefulness. People with dysarthria frequently worry a lot about being able to speak clearly on the phone. One option for people who have trouble understanding spoken language is to use a telecommunication relay service (TRS), another is to have someone else make the phone call, a third is to use a voice output communication aid (VOCA) that uses synthesized or digital speech, and finally, a fourth is to use dysarthria speech (Silverman & Schauer, 1996).

(b) Face-To-Face Meeting Communication Strategy

The capacity to provide instant response and the wealth of information conveyed by non-verbal and verbal cues (volume, pitch, and tone of voice) make face-to-face communication the most fruitful approach. "Communication that transcends the bare elements of the written or spoken word" is the most general definition of non-verbal communication. "Proxemics" refers to the use of personal space and distance, "kinesics" to body postures and movement, "oculesics" to the communicative aspects of eye behaviour like gaze and movement, and "vocalic" to paralanguage like vocal intonation and tone, according to

Gabbott and Hogg (2001). Not only that, but Gabbott and Hogg (2001) stress that gender, culture, and individual characteristics are three factors that can influence the non-verbal communication that occurs in every interaction, whether deliberate or not. Misunderstandings can arise when these elements influence how non-verbal cues are understood. Since the availability and strength of both verbal and nonverbal clues determine the media richness, each of these four nonverbal communication styles takes on added significance within the framework of media richness theory (Sheer & Chen, 2004). According to those who advocate face-to-face communication, it is the most favoured way of staff-management engagement and is more effective than information relayed through a central communication department (Ko & Yeh, 2013). Team briefings held in person have many benefits over other forms of communication, such as written materials, video presentations, and electronic mail, including the dissemination of the organization's core values and principles, the strategy, and the chance for participants to ask questions, voice opinions, and receive and provide feedback. Furthermore, rich media has the potential to bring a manager and subordinate closer together and put emphasis on the individual.

(c) Email Communication Strategy

According to Olson and Lucas (1982), e-mail improves work performance because it provides for a rapid flow of messages, enables asynchronous information dissemination, and is affordable. Because of the nearly uncontrollable flow, which can lead to information overload, these features can decrease productivity (Landauer, 1995; Gupta, Maranas & McDonald 2000; Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1996). Similarly, 32% of managers experienced a "deluge" of e-mails, according to the Chartered Management Institute (2001), which begs the question of how regular employees are impacted. Research conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom on the topic of email overload has shown that it negatively impacts the well-being of employees (e.g., Goldschmidt, Folk, Callahan, & Shapiro, 2001; Whittaker & Sidner, 1997). A recent study found that while almost 100% of respondents were satisfied with email, 70% felt that it had become unmanageable (Ingham, 2003). There was a lack of control over important e-mail variables in this research, such as the nature of the messages (work vs. non-work), the quantity of messages sent and received, the frequency of emails, and the percentage of emails that were work-related. According to the richness theory, email isn't rich enough because of the exponential growth in its usage across all organisational levels, including senior management, for a wide variety of tasks, including those with high degrees of ambiguity. Employees prefer to do most of their business via email rather than via phone or in person because of the perceived savings, reliability, and efficiency it offers (Berghel 1997 in Renaud, Ramsay & Hair 2006). According to Renaud, Ramsay, and Hair (2006), email also keeps a record of requests or directions, which might be helpful for resolving future disagreements.

2.3 Small and Medium Scale Performance

A key element of every strategy for performance enhancement is communication. Organizations that are keen to achieve their strategic objectives have clear communication plans. Employee engagement and alignment with the organization's business objectives are hallmarks of a well-defined plan. Richard, Devinney, Yip, and Johnson (2009) state that organisational performance includes three distinct aspects of firm outcomes: shareholder return (total shareholder return, economic value added); product market performance (sales, market share); and financial performance (profits, return on assets, return on investment). To develop the skills and attitudes required for performance management, Ricardo (2001) contended that result-oriented behaviour criterion-based and relative normative measures, education and training, concepts and instruments, such as management development and leadership training, could all be included in performance measures. According to the literature study mentioned above, "performance" should be defined more broadly to encompass effectiveness, efficiency, economy, quality, consistency, behaviour, and normative metrics (Ricardo, 2001).

2.4 The Cybernetics Theory

W. Ross Ashby and Norbert Wiener's 1960 "Cybernetics theory," which focused on mathematical theory of communication and control systems through regulatory feedback, served as the foundation for the researchers' theoretical framework in this investigation. Feedback can be instantaneous (when the reaction is given right away) or delayed; it can be positive (when the desired outcome is obtained) or negative. Feedback is used to assess the success of a given scenario or message that has been presented. Cybernetics is the study of how regulatory feedback is communicated and controlled in both living and non-living systems (machines, organizations, and animals), as well as in combinations of those. To better fulfill those three main duties, it focuses on how anything—digital, mechanical, or biological controls its behaviour, processes information, reacts to information, and changes or can be modified.

2.5 Participatory Communication Theory

Hypothesis The foundation of participatory communication theory, which was initially made popular by Freire in 1970, is the idea that the effectiveness of development initiatives rests on their capacity to guarantee that people are engaged and participate in the decision-making process (Karl, 2000). Since it guarantees that all pertinent stakeholders understand the need and take ownership of the program, this theory argues that inclusiveness and discourse in decision-making are the only surefire ways to achieve sustainable programs. Karl (2007) contends that collaborating with pertinent stakeholders and communities is the only way interventions or programs would be successful. According to Freire (1970), communication must be founded on the ideas of participation, conversation, and mutual understanding of exchanging viewpoints in order to achieve its goals and be effective.

3. Research Method

Descriptive survey research design was chosen for this investigation. This is since the carefully crafted questionnaires were utilized to gather the data needed for the study. Because it offers a contextual analysis, its design is thought to be suitable for this investigation. The owners and managers of all small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Akure city make up the study's target group. Consequently, there are 535 owners and managers of SMEs in total (Source: Ondo State's Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency). In this research work, convenience sampling was the method used for sampling. This is due to factors like proximity, cost, availability, time, and completion time.

$n = N/(1+Ne^2)$ where
n = sample size
N = population size= 535
e = sampling error=0.05
$n = 535/[1+535\ (0.05)^2]$
$= 229$

A probability-sampling technique was used in the investigation. By using a random sample strategy, the researcher was able to contact many people. There were 229 sample participants in all for this study. For this investigation, primary data was used. A well-structured questionnaire was used to collect the data. There were two sections to the questionnaires. The respondents' biographical information, including name, age, sex, marital status, and employment history, is included in the first part. Information about the ongoing enhancement of SMEs' performance in the city of Ado-Ekiti may be found in the second part.

Two subject-matter experts from the Business Administration department of the Faculty of Management Sciences at Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology shall be given the questionnaire to certify its face and content validity. These experts will be asked to critically examine the instrument to ensure that the items are pertinent, the contents are appropriate and adequately representative, and the assertions are clear. Following the exercise, their contributions shall be combined and considered in the creation of the instrument's final version of the instrument. It is a gauge of how well a research tool produces reliable findings following numerous tests. An instrument is considered dependable if it yields consistent results when used repeatedly during the data collection process. Cronbach Alpha will be used for the reliability test.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shown sixty-three point nine percent (63.9%) of the respondents were female, while thirty-six point one percent (36.1%) were male, according to the respondents' sex distribution. The respondents' ages are as follows: twenty-one point three percent (21.3%) are between the ages of twenty and twenty-six; forty point six percent (40.6%) are between the ages of twenty-seven and thirty-three; twenty-six point five percent (26.5%) are between the ages of thirty-four and forty-one; and eleven point six percent (11.6%) are forty-one years of age or older.

According to the respondents' educational backgrounds, thirty-five point five percent (35.5%) are graduates of ND/NCE, thirty-four point eight percent (34.8%) are graduates of HND/B.Sc., and twenty-nine point seven percent (29.7%) have additional qualifications not listed in the study. A breakdown of respondents' positions inside the firm showed that 49 (31.6%) are business owners, 56 (36.1%) are managers, 44 (28.4%) are secretaries, and 6 (3.9%) are attendants.

According to the respondents' work experience, forty-nine point seven percent (49.7%) had less than five years of experience, thirty-three point five percent (33.5%) had between five and eight years, and sixteen point eight percent (16.8%) had twelve years or more.

Table 1: Demographic Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Sex Distribution		
Male	56	36.1
Female	99	63.9
Total	155	100.0
Age Distribution		
20-26Years	33	21.3
27-33Years	63	40.6
34-40Years	41	26.5
41Years and Above	18	11.6
Total	155	100.0
Education		
ND/NCE	55	35.5
HND/B.Sc.	54	34.8
Other Qualification	46	29.7
Total	155	100.0
Position		
Owner	49	31.6
Manager	56	36.1
Secretary	44	28.4
Attendant	6	3.9
Total	155	100.0
Work Experience		
Less than 5Years	77	49.7
5-8Years	52	33.5
12Years and above	26	16.8
Total	155	100.0

4.1 Audio/telephone and Performance of small and medium enterprises

The respondents' ratings on two variables—the performance of small and medium-sized businesses and audio/telephone—were calculated and subjected to basic regression analysis in order to evaluate this hypothesis. According to Table 4.2, the correlation coefficient, or R, has a positive value of 0.488, indicating a very strong and positive association between small and medium-sized business performance and audio/telephone. The percentage of the dependent variable's overall fluctuation that can be accounted for by the independent variables' variation is known as the R2. According to the results, R2 is equal to 0.238, which suggests that audio/telephone contributed roughly 23.8% of the variance in small and medium-sized businesses' performance. This is further supported by the adjusted R2, which indicates the model's goodness of fit and yields a value of 0.233. This suggests that after all errors and adjustments are made, the model can only account for 23.3% of the variance, with the remaining

76.7% being explained by the error term in the model, as indicated in Table 4.2.

With a t-value of 6.919 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05, the unstandardized beta coefficient for audio/telephone is 0.593. These findings demonstrated that the performance of small and medium-sized businesses is positively correlated with audio and telephone. According to this, using audio and telephone communication within SME firms facilitates the speedy resolution of internal problems, which strengthens teamwork and boosts operational efficiency. The null hypothesis that audio and telephone do not significantly affect the performance of small and medium-sized businesses is rejected based on the discussion in Table 2 of Objective 1 and the F-Stat. 52.652 p-value 0.000 <.05. This led us to adopt the alternative theory that small and medium-sized businesses' performance is impacted by audio and telephone.

Table 2: Audio/telephone and Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises

Variable	Coeff.	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.822	0.350	5.202	0.000
Audio/telephone	0.593	0.086	6.919	0.000
R	0.488			
R Square	0.238			
Adj. R Square	0.233			
F Stat.	47.867(0.000)			

4.2 Dependent variable: SMEs performance

(a) Face-to-face meeting and Performance of small and medium enterprises

The respondents' ratings on two variables—face-to-face meetings and small and medium-sized business performance—were calculated and put through a basic regression analysis to evaluate this hypothesis. According to Table 4.3, the correlation coefficient, or R, has a positive value of 0.488, indicating a strong and positive association between small and medium-sized business performance and in-person meetings. The percentage of the dependent variable's overall fluctuation that can be accounted for by the independent variables' variation is known as R^2. The results show that face-to-face meetings contributed approximately 23.9% of the variance in small and medium-sized business performance. This is further supported by the adjusted R^2, which indicates the model's goodness of fit and yields a value of 0.234. This indicates that, after correcting and adjusting for all errors, face-to-face meetings can only account for 23.4% of the variance, with the remaining 76.6% being explained by the model's error term, as indicated in Table 3.

Face-to-face meetings have an unstandardised beta coefficient of 0.620, t = 6.925, and p = 0.000 < 0.05. These findings demonstrate that in-person meetings are positively correlated with small and medium-sized business performance. This suggests that in-person meetings are essential for efficient corporate communication, and that frequent in-person meetings improve teamwork and productivity for prompt resolution of disputes and misunderstandings.

The null hypothesis that in-person meetings have no discernible impact on the performance of small and medium-sized businesses is rejected based on the discussion in Table 3 of goal two and the F-Stat. 47.952 p-value 0.000 <.05. This led us to adopt the alternative hypothesis that in-person meetings had an impact on small and medium-sized businesses' performance.

Table 3: Face-to-face meeting and Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises

Variable	Coeff.	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.749	0.360	4.853	0.000
Face-to-face meeting	0.620	0.090	6.925	0.000
R	0.488			
R Square	0.239			
Adj. R Square	0.234			
F Stat.	47.952(0.000)			

Dependent variable: SMEs performance

(b) Email communication strategy and Performance of small and medium enterprises

The respondents' scores on two variables—email communication strategies and small and medium-sized business performance—were calculated and put through a straightforward regression analysis to evaluate this hypothesis. According to Table 4, the correlation coefficient, or R, has a positive value of 0.523, indicating a strong and positive association between small and medium-sized business performance and email communication strategy. The percentage of the dependent variable's overall fluctuation that can be accounted for by the independent variables' variation is known as R^2.

The results indicate that the email communication strategy contributed approximately 27.3% to the variance in the performance of small and medium-sized businesses. This is further supported by the adjusted R2, which indicates the model's goodness of fit and yields a value of 0.268. This indicates that, after correcting and adjusting for all errors, the model can only account for 26.8% of the variance in the performance of small and medium-sized businesses, with the remaining 73.2% being explained by the model's error term, as indicated in Table 4.

With a t-value of 7.583 and a p-value of 0.000 < 0.05, the unstandardized beta coefficient of the email communication approach is 0.577. These findings demonstrated a positive correlation between small and medium-sized business success and email communication strategy. This implies that an email communication strategy improves internal communication effectiveness and speeds up organisational decision-making.

The null hypothesis—that email communication strategy has no discernible impact on small and medium-sized businesses' performance—is rejected based on the Table 4 discussion in goal three and the F-Stat. 57.501, p-value 0.000 <.05. This led us to adopt the alternative premise that small and medium-sized businesses' performance is impacted by their email communication strategy.

Table 4: Email communication strategy and Performance of Small and Medium Enterprises

Variable	Coeff.	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.888	0.312	6.052	0.000
Email communication strategy	0.577	0.076	7.583	0.000
R	0.523			
R Square	0.273			
Adj. R Square	0.268			
F Stat.	57.501(0.000)			

Dependent variable: SMEs performance

5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Summary

The study observed how communication tactics affected the success of SMEs in the city of Akure. The precise goals, however, are to ascertain the connection between the performance of SMEs in Akure city and their audio/telephone communication strategy, investigate the impact of face-to-face meeting communication strategy on SMEs' performance in Akure city, and evaluate the impact of email communication strategy on SMEs' performance in Akure city.

The owners and managers of all small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Akure city make up the study's target group. Consequently, there are 535 owners and managers of SMEs in total (Source: Ondo State's Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency). In this study project, convenience sampling was the method used for sampling. This is due to factors like proximity, cost, availability, time, and completion time. A probability-sampling technique was used in the investigation. By using a random sample strategy, researchers can contact many people. There were 229 sample participants in all for this study. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data gathered for this investigation. Frequency tables and percentages were used to analyze the respondent demographic factors and responses.

The null hypothesis, according to the results, is rejected since it is not true that audio or telephones have a substantial impact on the performance of small and medium-sized businesses. This led us to adopt the alternative theory that small and medium-sized businesses' performance is impacted by audio and telephone. The null hypothesis, according to the results, is rejected since it is not true that in-person meetings have a major impact on the performance of small and medium-sized businesses. This led us to adopt the alternative hypothesis that in-person meetings had an impact on small and medium-sized businesses' performance. Since the results demonstrated that the null hypothesis—that email communication strategy has no discernible impact on small and medium-sized business performance is untrue, it is rejected. This led us to adopt the alternative premise that small and medium-sized businesses' performance is impacted by their email communication strategy.

5.2 Conclusion

Small and medium enterprises can boost teamwork and operational efficiency by swiftly addressing internal problems using audio and telephone communication. In-person meetings are essential for efficient communication in the workplace, and frequent in-person meetings improve teamwork and productivity for promptly addressing disputes and misunderstandings. Email communication strategy improves internal communication effectiveness and speeds up organisational decision-making.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following measures are suggested to enhance the performance of SMEs:

i. Business organizations ought to offer channels that enable quick and effective communication amongst all internal stakeholders.
ii. Management should put in place efficient systems to guarantee that all stakeholders, both inside and outside the company, receive reliable information.
iii. When speaking with internal and external partners, organisational stakeholders should make an effort to give accurate information.
iv. It's critical that everyone in the organization pay attention well, especially when someone is speaking to them.

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