Satisfaction with managers' use of communication channels and its effect on employee-organisation relationships*

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The study investigates managers' use of communication channels and employees' satisfaction with it, including its effects on the employee-organisation relationships. Through a web survey of 205 employees from Slovenia and Serbia, the study showed that top managers most commonly utilise face-to-face communication, middle managers most frequently use e-mails and telephone calls, while frontline managers use face-to-face communication and telephone calls. Slovenian employees prefer to receive information from managers by e-mails, Serbian by telephone calls. Employees are more satisfied with the organisation when their managers use more telephone calls and e-mails to communicate with them.

1. Introduction

Scholars and professionals across management and communication fields have increasingly recognised the significant role of managers' communication in the quality of internal relationships by enabling communication between managers and employees (Smyth/Mounter 2008; Hargie/Tourish 2009; Whitworth 2011; Verčič Tkalec/Verčič/Krishnamurthy 2012; Welch 2012). Managers' communication influences employees' attitudes and behaviours, especially by providing an important context and setting the tone for communication practices (Kim/Rhee 2011; Men/Stacks 2013; Men 2015).

In an effort to understand and describe how an effective managers' communication might be achieved, authors have drawn upon the theory of media richness (Daft/Lengel 1983; Daft/Lengel/Trevino 1987), arguing that the effective managers' communication depends on suitable messages delivered by communication channels that are acceptable and functional to employees, since a message may be understood differently depending on the channel through which it is delivered (Byrne/LeMay 2006; Welch 2012). The rise of new information and

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communication technologies has provided new possibilities for managers' use of communication channels, which may have an impact on the flow of information resulting in changed internal relationships (Kiesler/Siegel/McGuire 1984; Postmes/Russell/Lea 1998). Although social media such as Facebook have become indispensable tools for internal communication (Kelleher 2009; Friedl/Verčič 2011; Men/Tsai 2013; Men 2015), Men's study (2015) shows that top managers in the USA have slowly started using such tools to communicate with employees. What channels do managers use to communicate with employees in Eastern Europe? Namely, intercultural communication studies in Eastern European countries (Klopčič/Vitić Gasparić/Erjavec 2016) showed that there are some cross-cultural differences among Eastern Europeans, which could lead to differences in employees' satisfactions with managers' use of communication channels. Therefore, the question arises as to whether there are any differences between Eastern European countries regarding managers' use of communication channels.

Despite the growing professional interest in and literature on managers' communication, few scholarly attempts have been made to examine the channels of internal communication by managers (Byrne/LeMay 2006; White/Vanc/Stafford 2010; Men/Tsai 2013; Welch 2012; Men 2014 a, 2014 b, 2015). However, no study has examined whether employees in Eastern Europe are satisfied with the communication channels chosen by managers working at different levels, and how their use of communication channels affects internal relationships. Therefore, this study examines the channels that are currently used by managers at different organisational levels (i.e. top management, middle management, and frontline management) to communicate with employees in Slovenia and Serbia, as well as the effects of the employees' satisfaction with the use of communication channels by managers on the relationship between employees and the organisation.

2. Literature preview

The study is based on the medium theory, which emphasises the complex relationship between the medium and the message, built on McLuhan's (1964) well-known notion that *the medium is the message*. According to McLuhan (1964:8), new technologies have "psychic and social consequences" that go beyond the content being delivered, affecting our relation to others and the world in general. McLuhan wrote this in the context of the typewriter and the telephone, but the phrase is even more apt when applied to the new information and communication technologies. Experts agree the chosen communication channel shapes a key aspect of the communication and therefore affects the interpretation of the message (Meyrowitz 1998). Recently also many business communication scholars supported this idea by showing how media play a symbolic and practical role within an organisation (Byrne/LeMay 2006; White et al. 2010; Men/Tsai

2013; Welch 2012; Men 2014 a, 2014 b, 2015). For example, White et al. (2010) found that employees associate the sense of importance with meetings providing access to the dominant coalition, even when the information presented in the meeting could be posted on the Web or sent in an e-mail.

2.1. Media richness theory

The study also bases on the media richness theory, which is a framework used to describe how communication channels should be utilised in order to successfully transmit different types of information (Daft/Lengel 1983). The theory is based on presumption that people match the communication task with media they perceived to be most efficient for accomplishing the tasks (Kelleher 2009). According to the founder of the theory, task performance will be improved if the communication channel matches the needs of the organisations' information processing tasks – but only in terms of equivocality and uncertainty (Daft/Lengel 1983).

Media can be characterised as high or low in richness based on "the potential information carrying capacity of data" (Daft/Lengel 1983:7). The information carrying capacity is determined by quick feedback or interactivity, personal focus (i.e. the ability to direct the messages to a specific individual), multiple communication cues (i.e. the use of verbal and non-verbal cues), and language variety (i.e. the ability to communicate in a conversational style) (Daft/Lengel 1983; Daft et al. 1987). If these four constructs are high, a channel is considered rich since it has greater means to convey a message (Daft/Lengel 1983). Complex tasks require a richer communication channel to be successfully communicated and vice versa for simpler tasks. As the information thereafter travels downward in the hierarchy, it changes its shape into simpler formats for the sake of efficiency. Face-to-face communication is the richest channel optimal for communicating complex information, because it facilitates quick feedback, the use of natural language and multiple cues, as well as personal focus. Simple documents, such as announcements, annual reports, posters, are lean (i.e. less rich) and impersonal channels. E-mails and telephone calls could be positioned in the middle of the media richness continuum (Daft/Lengel 1983). Matching the communication channel to the message is relevant for efficiency (Daft/Lengel 1983; Holmin/Safarova 2015). A leaner communication channel for transmitting complex information may oversimplify the message; just as using a richer channel for transmitting simple information could provide more cues than necessary, which can distract the receiver from the main point of the message (Daft/Lengel 1983; Daft et al. 1987; Holmin/Safarova 2015). It is, therefore, important to provide information with enough richness to reduce equivocality while simultaneously providing enough information to minimise uncertainty (Daft/Lengel 1983; Holmin/Safarova 2015). Simple organisational issues, which are low in equivocality and uncertainty, are easy to conceptualise, routine, mechanistic or pre-

dictable in their outcome. This type of information can successfully be communicated through a leaner channel. Complex issues (high in equivocality and uncertainty) involve an aspect of unpredictability in the outcome and are more difficult to analyse due to intangible aspects that are sometimes emotion laden. Complex messages, therefore, need richer channels for successful communication (Daft/Lengel 1983; Daft et al. 1987; Holmin/Safarova 2015).

2.2. Managers' communication channels

There is no doubt that leadership is performed predominately by communication through various communication channels – from traditional print publications (e.g. newsletters, magazines, memos), telephone calls, voicemails, and face-to-face communication, to new information and communication technologies, such as intranet, blogs, instant messaging, and internal social networking sites.

Pincus/Rayfield/Cozzens (1991) found that the majority of top managers' communication is based on interpersonal channels, such as face-to-face communication and "management by walking around". They also frequently communicate with employees through articles in internal publication, group meetings, speech and memos, and telephone calls. A more recent Men and Hung-Baesecke's study on manager's communication channels in China (2015) shows that they most commonly use face-to-face communication ($M = 5.04$; 1 = "strongly disagree", 7 = "strongly agree"), such as employee meetings and one-to-one supervisory meetings, followed by e-mail ($M = 5.04$) and telephone communication ($M = 5.04$). Men's study (2015) on the use of communication channels by top managers demonstrated that they most frequently use e-mail (83.5%) and face-to-face channels to communicate with employees (67.3%). These channels were followed by Intranet (38.5%) and print media, such as newsletters, magazines, memos, posters, and flyers (31.4%). The study results also showed that top managers have increasingly started using social media tools such as Facebook (22.9%), Twitter (11.6%), LinkedIn (9.7%), YouTube (6.1%), blogs (5.9%), and Instagram (5%) to manage their online presence, however, only a small number have used them to interactively communicate with employees. Although top managers generally showed a moderate level of social media presence, their social media presence was found to be strongly and positively related to the employee perception of top managers' communication and employee relational outcomes. This can be explained by the fact that social media communication, which is relational, interactive, communal, and personal, and mimics traditional face-to-face interpersonal communication, was found to be effective in top managers' communication with employees (Men 2015). Moreover, the empowering nature of social media fosters equal dialogues between managers and employees, reduces the power distance, facilitates employees' upward communication, and promotes two-way information flow and communication symmetry in the

organisation (Men 2014 b; Men 2015). Men's findings implied that different levels of organisational leadership (i.e. top management, middle management, and frontline management) may influence internal communication practices and effectiveness in various degrees, therefore, she suggested that future researchers should examine their specific communication roles (Men 2015:469).

2.3. Employee satisfaction with managers' communication and its effect on the relationship between employees and the organisation

In the relationship management literature, satisfaction refers to the degree which parties to the relationship are satisfied with each other (Hon/Grunig 1999; Men 2014 b). The effective communication is fundamental to employee-organisation satisfaction (Guo/Giacobbe-Miller 2011; Bisel/Messersmith 2012). Numerous researchers have recognised the importance of managers' effective use of internal communication channels for positive employee relational outcomes (Cameron/McCollum 1993; White et al. 2010; Welch 2012; Men 2014 b; 2015). For example, Men's findings (2014 b) demonstrated a small positive effect of the employees' satisfaction with the use of face-to-face communication by managers on the relationship between employees and the organisation.

Employees in general predominately prefer interpersonal face-to-face communication with management to mediated communication, such as e-mail (Cameron/McCollum 1993; White et al. 2010; Welch 2012; Men 2014 b; 2015). For example, Cameron and McCollum (1993) noted that employees preferred face-to-face communication with management over mediated communication. White et al. (2010) found that although e-mail is efficient for information exchange, the preference for communication among all groups of employees is face-to-face, interpersonal and dialogic interaction. Meetings, despite being acknowledged as time-consuming, were valued as a channel for feedback and providing face time with top managers (White et al. 2010). Men 2014 b also confirmed that employees prefer interpersonal communication in communicating with organisational leaders, followed by e-mails by which they rather receive information from the organisation regarding new decisions, policies, events or changes. However, this is contradictory to Byrne and Le May's (2006) finding that lean media are mostly related to employees' satisfaction and that e-mails are preferred by employees only when receiving urgent news. This may be explained by the fact that technological development has made e-mail an important part of employees' daily communication routine, indicating that the communication medium preferred by employees has changed over time (Men 2014 b), and that employees' satisfaction with managers' communication should be reconsidered. In particular, employees' satisfaction with managers' communication in different countries should be examined, since there is a lack of research in this field.

2.4. Cross-cultural differences in business communication

Managers' communication is the area where cross-cultural differences can be seen. Cross-cultural differences stem from the different backgrounds of each culture. The works of Edward Hall (1976) and Geert Hofstede (1980) are considered indispensable to any intercultural study on management. Their findings include a set of categories into which we can systemise cultures; for example, low-context/high-context culture communication (Hall 1976) and collectivism/individualism (Hofstede 1980). To summarise Hall's argument (1976), including the category of context as the most useful for our study, we could argue that in low-context cultures, like the United States and Northern European countries, they usually use a more *direct*, *explicit verbal* communication, based on *logic and rationality*. On the other hand, in high-context cultures, like in Latin America or Southern Europe, most information is either contained in the physical context of an event or internalised in people. These implicit cultures prefer *indirect, low reliance on written* communication and more on *non-verbal* and *circular interpersonal communication* by the use of intuition and feelings to make decision (Hall 1976).

Hofstede (1980) analysed the responses from over 116,000 IBM employees to questions about their job and work settings revealing systematic cultural differences across four dimensions: *power distance*, *individualism/collectivism*, *uncertainty avoidance*, and *masculinity/femininity*. In the culture that values *power distance*, strict hierarchical management levels, autocratic leadership, and the expectation of inequality prevail. In contrast, Scandinavian cultures are ruled by the low power-distance characterised by flat organisation structures, consultative or participative management style, and the expectation of egalitarianism. Cultures that value *individualism* have more independent managers and employees who show responsibility towards any task they have to perform which may lead to creativity. On the other hand, in cultures that value collectivism managers and employees in the top management tend to delegate authority to other employees (Kamar 2012). Although Hofstede's research (1980) did not include some regions and countries of Central and Eastern Europe, his dimensional model was also as a paradigm for new countries. For example, Elenkov (1998) found in his comparative study that US managers are more individualistic than their Russian counterparts, and the managerial culture in the United States is characterised by a lower power distance than in the Russian managerial culture.

To apply the media richness theory to the intercultural business communication, it could be argued that in high-context cultures, based on indirect, non-written, non-verbal, interpersonal communication with more collectivistic and power distanced management, face-to-face communication channels prevail. On the other hand, in the low-context cultures, based on direct verbal and written com-

munication with more individualistic and low power-distanced management, mediated communication channels such as e-mail prevail.

Intercultural communication studies on the communication in Eastern European countries (Magun 2011; Hlepas 2013; Klopčič et al. 2016) showed that Eastern Europeans belong to the high-context culture, according to contextual dimension (Hall 1976), collectivism/individualism and power distance (Hofstede 1980). However, those who live in more northern and western countries in this region, such as Slovenia, are characterised by a more individualistic, rational and direct verbal approach than people from the more southern and eastern countries, such as Serbia, who are characterised by a more collectivistic, emotional, non-verbal, and interpersonal communication approach. Thus, Slovenians prefer different approach to communication than Serbians (Magun 2011; Hlepas 2013; Klopčič et al. 2016). The selection of Slovenia and Serbia in the research is useful for the intercultural study on the managers' use of communication channels mainly because the countries share a common history of the 20th century (the common state in which the same regulations were enforced), and different communication patterns are used (Klopčič et al. 2016).

To advance the understanding of how communication channels are used by managers at different levels to communicate with employees in Eastern Europe, and how employees' satisfaction with the use of communication channels by managers influences the relationship between employees, the following questions should be addressed:

RQ1: What communication channels do managers at different organisational levels in Slovenia and Serbia most frequently use to communicate with employees?

RQ2: How are employees in Slovenia and Serbia satisfied with the managers' use of communication channels?

RQ3: How does the satisfaction with the managers' use of communication channels affect the relationship between employees and the organisation?

With regard to previous research findings (Magun 2011; Hlepas 2013; Klopčič et al. 2016), showing that Slovenians prefer different approach to communication than Serbians, the study predicts that there are cross-cultural differences in the employees' satisfaction with the managers' use of communication channels:

H1: There are cross-cultural differences in the employees' satisfaction with the managers' use of communication channels, namely, that Slovenian employees are more satisfied with the use of e-mail, while Serbian employees are more satisfied with face-to-face communication.

The study also predicts that employees' satisfaction with the use of communication channels by managers will influence the quality of employee-organisation relationships:

H2:   Satisfaction with the managers' use of communication channels positively influences employee-organisation relationships.

3. Method

3.1. Population and sample

A quantitative online survey was conducted to explore the research questions and to test the hypotheses. The study population comprised employees at different positions in medium- and large-sized companies from variety of industries in Slovenia and Serbia. Instead of participant companies, individual employees of various companies were recruited by two research organisations by their member research panel in Slovenia and Serbia. Stratified and quota random sampling was used to obtain representative sample with comparable ages, gender, education and size of companies in both countries.

A final sample size of 205 respondents was obtained. The sample was composed of 45.1% males and 54.9% females. The average age was 43 years, and the average corporate tenure was 21 years. Most of the respondents finished a secondary school (58%) and 23% held at least a bachelor's degree.

3.2. Measures

Using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree" employee–organisational relational outcomes were measured in this study. The measure was adapted from the widely used measure of organisation–public relationships developed by Hon and Grunig (1999). This 20-item instrument comprises the following four sub-constructs: employee trust (e.g. "This company can be relied on to keep its promises;" α= 0.91), control mutuality (e.g. "This company and I are attentive to what each other says;"α= 0.82), commitment (e.g. "I would rather work together with this company than not;" α= 0.88), and satisfaction (e.g. "I enjoy dealing with this company;" α= 0.86).

To explore the managers' use of communication channels at different organisational levels, three five-point Likert-type scale (1 = "never", 5 = "very often") questions were asked: (a) How often does your top manager use (the name of the medium) to communicate with you? (b) How often does your middle manager use (the name of the medium) to communicate with you? (c) How often does your frontline manager use (the name of the medium) to communicate with you?

Additionally, to explore satisfaction with the managers' use of communication channels at different organisational levels, three 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = "completely dissatisfied", 5 = "completely satisfied") questions were asked: (a)

To what extent are you satisfied with the use of (the name of the medium) to communicate with your top manager? (b) To what extent are you satisfied with the use of (the name of the medium) to communicate with your middle manager? (c) To what extent are you satisfied with the use of (the name of the medium) to communicate with your frontline manager?

The selection of communication channels was based on the previous managers' channels studies (Men/Tsai 2013; Men 2014 a, 2014 b, 2015; Holmin/Safarova 2015), on the opinion of several experts on Slovenian and Serbian management, and on two focus group discussion with 16 consumers with different social characteristics, carried out in Slovenia and Serbia: face-to-face, such as one-to-one meetings and managing by walking around, telephone calls, e-mails, physical texts (reports, memos, company letters), intranet (electronic texts), video calls and conferences, chats, blog, instant messaging, internal social networks sites (SNS), and hung notices.

One pre-test and one preliminary survey were conducted prior to survey administration to ensure the reliability and validity of the measure. The pre-test was conducted on 20 employees who were recruited through convenience sampling from two companies in December 2016. Respondents completed the online survey sent through e-mail and social networking apps and provided feedback on the wording, thematic clarity, and format of the survey. Minor revisions were subsequently made to the survey based on respondent feedback. In the beginning of January 2017, the final survey questionnaire was sent to 640 randomly selected employees with online-published e-mail addresses working in medium- and large-sized organisations in Slovenia and Serbia. Since the first response rate was below 10%, in the beginning of February 2017, the online invitation was sent again. The final response rate was 32%. Preliminary analysis of the reliability and validity of the measures yielded satisfactory results. Therefore, all of the measurement instruments of key variables remained the same in the formal survey.

Data were analysed by SPSS 24.0, using descriptive statistics, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and correlation statistics.

4. Results

4.1. Use of communication channels by managers

Table 1 shows that top managers most commonly communicate face-to-face with employees, specifically statistically more significant in Serbia ($M = 3.38$, SD = 0.68) than in Slovenia ($M = 3.25$, SD = 0.77), followed by the use of e-mails, statistically more significant in Slovenia ($M = 2.95$, SD = 0.71) than in Serbia ($M = 2.84$, SD = 0.63), telephone calls, statistically more significant in Serbia ($M = 2.84$, SD = 0.92) than in Slovenia ($M = 2.81$, SD = 0.61), intranet, statistically more significant in Slovenia ($M = 2.76$, SD = 0.91) than in Serbia

(M = 2.62, SD = 0.59) and physical texts, namely more in Serbia (M = 2.57, SD = 0.74) than in Slovenia (M = 2.48, SD = 0.69). Other channels reported by the respondents included video calls and conferences, chats, blogs; internal social network sites (SNS), hung notices and instant messaging were used rarely.

Study results also show (Table 1) that middle managers most commonly use e-mails to communicate with employees, specifically statistically more significant in Slovenia (M = 3.67, SD = 0.93) than in Serbia (M = 3.53, SD = 0.81), followed by telephone calls, statistically more significant in Serbia (M = 3.51, SD = 0.83) than in Slovenia (M = 3.48, SD = 0.79), physical texts, namely statistically more significant in Serbia (M = 2.90, SD = 0.86) than in Slovenia (M = 2.77, SD = 0.99), face-to face communication, statistically more significant in Serbia (M = 2.89, SD = 0.78) than in Slovenia (M = 2.59, SD = 0.68) and intranet, statistically more significant in Serbia (M = 2.67, SD = 0.84) than in Slovenia (M = 2.59, SD = 0.71). Other channels, such as chats, blogs, internal social network sites (SNS), instant messaging, video calls and hung notices, were used rarely.

Respondents also reported (Table 1) that their frontline managers most commonly use face-to-face communication, specifically statistically more significant in Serbia (M = 3.96, SD = 0.79) than in Slovenia (M = 3.81, SD = 0.77), followed by phone calls, statistically more in Serbia (M = 3.91, SD = 0.71) than in Slovenia (M = 3.75, SD = 0.91), and e-mail significant in Slovenia (M = 3.04, SD = 0.79) than in Serbia (M = 2.92, SD = 0.77), physical texts, statistically more significant in Serbia (M = 3.09, SD = 0.73) than in Slovenia (M = 2.77, SD = 0.79) and intranet, statistically more significant in Slovenia (M = 2.56, SD = 0.90) than in Serbia (M = 2.54, SD = 0.82). Other channels, such as chats, blogs, internal social network sites, hung notices, instant messaging and video calls, were used less frequently.

Table 1. Managers' use of communication channels by country

	Serbia N=103	Slovenia N=102	Total	F	p
Top managers					
Face-to-face	3.38	3.25	3.31	14.2	0.04
Phone calls	2.84	2.81	2.82	0.15	0.11
E-mails	2.84	2.95	2.85	11.4	0.02
Physical texts	2.57	2.48	2.58	22.9	0.03
Intranet	2.62	2.76	2.66	8.1	0.004
Video calls	1.81	1.73	1.77	57.4	0.002
Chats	1.26	1.61	1.43	4.2	0.02
Blogs	1.41	1.25	1.33	2.9	0.02
Instant messaging	1.23	1.53	1.38	18.7	0.03
SNS	1.43	1.52	1.47	0.12	
Hung notices	1.61	1.71	1.66	227.6	0.04
Middle managers					
Face-to-face	2.89	2.59	2.74	9.2	0.03
Phone calls	3.51	3.48	3.49	7.4	0.02
E-mails	3.53	3.67	3.6	50.8	0.004
Physical texts	2.90	2.77	2.83	17.5	0.002
Intranet	2.67	2.59	2.63	41.2	0.003
Video calls	1.79	1.67	1.73	9.5	0.004
Chats	1.41	1.21	1.31	27.1	0.003
Blogs	1.20	1.52	1.22	2.5	
Instant messaging	1.38	1.25	1.31	26.2	0.004
SNS	1.43	1.15	1.29	6.5	0.02
Hung notices	1.43	1.54	1.48	4.7	0.02

	Serbia N=103	Slovenia N=102	Total	F	p
Frontline managers					
Face-to-face	3.96	3.81	3.88	4.88	0.02
Phone calls	3.91	3.75	3.83	113.7	0.03
E-mails	3.04	2.92	2.98	12.1	0.03
Physical texts	3.09	2.77	2.93	6.99	0.004
Intranet	2.54	2.56	2.55	39.39	0.02
Video calls	1.68	1.48	1.58	4.15	0.03
Chats	1.41	1.26	1.33	4.77	0.04
Blogs	1.26	1.44	1.35	18.12	0.03
Instant messaging	1.38	1.31	1.34	0.61	0.21
SNS	1.27	1.58	1.42	32.10	0.02
Hung notices	1.46	1.52	1.49	0.73	0.15

Independent sample t-test

Table 2. Employees' satisfaction with the use of managers' communication by country

Top managers	Serbia N=103	Slovenia N=102	F	p-value
Face-to-face	2.97	2.57	2.99	0.003
Phone calls	3.59	3.52	8.18	0.02
E-mails	3.49	2.54	3.57	0.04
Physical texts	3.29	3.37	3.72	0.11
Intranet	3.20	3.20	10.82	0.16
Video calls	2.94	2.91	0.55	0.21
Chats	2.69	2.58	16.13	0.03
Blogs	2.60	2.62	10.37	0.04
Instant messaging	2.75	2.62	23.77	0.02
SNS	2.79	2.71	19.69	0.03
Hung notices	2.64	2.72	10.74	0.02
Middle managers				
Face-to-face	3.39	3.11	98.31	0.03
Phone calls	3.81	3.75	0.150	0.02
E-mails	3.81	3.89	3.01	0.04
Physical texts	3.28	3.38	6.79	0.03
Intranet	3.11	3.18	14.01	0.04
Video calls	2.86	2.94	0.03	0.29
Chats	2.75	2.74	19.53	0.03
Blogs	2.61	2.66	11.23	0.04
Instant messaging	2.73	2.83	25.42	0.03
SNS	2.78	2.73	29.10	0.04
Hung notices	2.83	2.78	10.21	0.03

Frontline managers	Serbia N=103	Slovenia N=102	F	p-value
Face-to-face	3.47	3.25	122.87	0.002
Phone calls	4.40	4.01	0.31	0.001
E-mails	3.39	4.13	0.04	0.03
Physical texts	3.26	3.42	2.04	0.15
Intranet	3.51	2.80	2.04	0.19
Video calls	2.85	2.85	7.319	0.21
Chats	2.97	2.66	1.06	0.27
Blogs	2.52	2.71	5.17	0.02
Instant messaging	3.04	2.97	7.32	0.22
SNS	3.14	2.79	8.52	0.04
Hung notices	2.74	2.79	9.82	0.17

Independent sample t-test

4.2. Employees' satisfaction with communication channels used by managers

Table 2 shows that respondents are most satisfied when their top managers use e-mails ($M = 3.61$, SD = 0.66), specifically statistically more significant in Slovenia ($M = 3.49$, SD = 0.91) than in Serbia ($M = 2.54$, SD = 0.82), followed by telephone calls, statistically more significant in Serbia ($M = 3.59$, SD = 0.98) than in Slovenia ($M = 3.52$, SD = 0.83), then physical texts and intranet, which means are not significantly different by country. Respondents reported that they are less satisfied with managers' use of face-to-face communication, video calls, chats, blogs, internal social network sites (SNS), hung notices, and instant messaging.

Respondents reported (Table 2) that they are most satisfied when their middle managers use e-mail, specifically statistically more significant in Slovenia ($M = 3.89$, SD = 0.64) than in Serbia ($M = 3.81$, SD = 0.51), followed by telephone calls, statistically more significant in Serbia ($M = 3.81$, SD = 0.59) than in Slovenia ($M = 3.75$, SD = 0.64), then physical texts, statistically more significant in Slovenia ($M = 3.38$, SD = 0.84) than in Serbia ($M = 3.28$, SD = 0.93), face-to-face communication, in fact more in Serbia ($M = 3.39$, SD = 0.71) than in Slovenia ($M = 3.11$, SD = 0.79) and intranet, statistically more significant in Slovenia ($M = 3.18$, SD = 0.72) than in Serbia ($M = 3.11$, SD = 0.71). Respondents are less satisfied with middle managers' use of the following channels: video calls, chats, blogs, internal social network sites, hung notices, and instant messaging.

Table 2 also shows respondents' satisfaction with frontline managers' use of communication channels. They are most satisfied with the use of telephone call communication, statistically more significant in Serbia ($M = 4.40$, SD = 0.67) than in Slovenia ($M = 4.01$, SD = 0.52), followed by e-mails, in fact more in Slovenia ($M = 4.13$, SD = 0.61) than in Serbia ($M = 3.39$, SD = 0.69), utilising face-to-face communication, namely statistically more significant in Serbia ($M = 3.47$, SD = 0.77) than in Slovenia ($M = 3.25$, SD = 0.69), physical texts, which means are not significantly different by country, and intranet, statistically more significant in Serbia ($M = 3.51$, SD = 0.92) than in Slovenia ($M = 2.80$, SD = 0.99).

Table 3 shows that there are differences in the employees' satisfaction with the use of communication channels by managers who are working at different levels. Respondents reported that they were most satisfied when frontline managers communicated with them by telephone ($M = 4.02$, SD = 0.69), then middle managers ($M = 3.78$, SD = 0.67), and were less satisfied with top managers ($M = 3.53$, SD = 0.64). They also reported that they were most satisfied when middle managers ($M = 3.85$, SD = 0.79), then frontline managers ($M = 3.76$, SD = 0.77) and at last top managers ($M = 3.55$, SD = 0.77) communicated with them by e-

mail. Respondents were most satisfied with the utilisation of face-to-face communication by frontline managers ($M = 3.36$, SD $= 0.77$), then by middle managers ($M = 3.25$, SD $= 0.61$), and top managers ($M = 2.77$, SD $= 0.62$). Employees were satisfied when frontline managers used instant messaging ($M = 3.00$, SD $= 0.84$), while the same cannot be said for middle managers ($M = 2.78$, SD $= 0.72$), and especially not for top managers (M $= 2.68$, SD $= 0.79$). There were no significant differences in satisfaction with the managers' use of communication channels at different management levels in terms of physical texts, video calls, conferences, chats, blogs, internal social networks sites, and hung notices. Respondents were most satisfied with managers' communication at all levels when using telephone calls.

Table 3. Satisfaction with managers' communication channels by management levels (N = 205)

Satisfaction	Means	Satisfaction	Means	Satisfaction	Means	F
Top managers		**Middle managers**		**Frontline managers**		
Face-to-face	2.77	Face-to-face	3.25	Face-to-face	3.36	8.79*
Phone calls	3.56	Phone calls	3.78	Phone calls	4.02	7.11*
E-mails	3.55	E-mails	3.85	E-mails	3.76	8.64*
Physical texts	3.33	Physical texts	3.33	Physical texts	3.34	7.12
Intranet	3.20	Intranet	3.17	Intranet	3.17	5.16*
Video calls, conferences	2.93	Video calls, conferences	2.90	Video calls, conferences	2.90	7.15
Chats	2.68	Chats	2.74	Chats	2.74	8.35
Blogs	2.61	Blogs	2.63	Blogs	2.61	8.12
Instant messaging	2.68	Instant messaging	2.78	Instant messaging	3.00	8.49*
Internal social network sites	2.75	Internal social network sites	2.75	Internal social network sites	2.97	7.96
Hung notices	2.68	Hung notices	2.81	Hung notices	2.76	7.99

ANOVA; Notes: F-value; ***p < 0.001;**p < 0.01;*p < 0.05.

4.3. Satisfaction with the managers' use of communication channels and employee-organisation relationships

Correlations between satisfaction with the frontline managers' use of communication channels and employee-organisation relationships reveal that employees' satisfaction with frontline managers' utilisation of telephone calls ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.01$) and e-mails ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.01$) to communicate positively and moderately correlates with employee relational outcomes. Correlations between satisfaction with the middle and top managers' use of communication channels and employee-organisation relationships show that employees' satisfaction with middle

managers' ($r = 0.86$, $p < 0.01$) and top managers' ($r = 0.73$, $p < 0.01$) use of e-mails positively and strongly correlates with employee-organisation relationships and employees' satisfaction with middle managers' ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$) and top managers' ($r = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$) use of telephone calls to communicate positively and moderate correlates with employee-organisation relationships. The other correlations were not significant.

5. Discussion

Study results on the communication channels that managers in Slovenia and Serbia most commonly use in communicating with employees demonstrated that top managers most frequently utilise face-to-face communication, followed by the use of e-mails and telephone calls. Middle managers most commonly use e-mails and then telephone calls to communicate with employees. Respondents also reported that their frontline managers most commonly use face-to-face communication and telephone calls. Use of different interpersonal and mediated channels to communicate with employees was confirmed by Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002). The study's findings are also in line with the findings of other studies (Men 2015; Men/Hung-Baesecke 2015), which showed that top managers communicate most frequently with employees through interpersonal channels of face-to-face communication, followed by communication via e-mail. This means that when top managers communicate with their subordinate, they utilise interpersonal communication such as employees meetings and one-to-one meetings.

The use of different communication channels by different management levels may be explained by the complexity of the work, interactivity, and time constraints. According to Holmin and Safarova (2015), top managers use face-to-face communication due to complex topics being discussed with a high need for feedback. Middle managers use e-mail due to being constantly interrupted and therefore need to access information at later times. The bottom managers use face-to-face communication due to time constraints (Holmin/Safarova 2015).

Comparison of managers' use of communication channels between Slovenia and Serbia showed that there are significant correlations between the country and the use of face-to-face communication, telephone calls, and e-mails. Slovenian managers at all organisation levels most commonly use e-mail, while Serbian top managers utilise face-to-face communication, and middle and frontline managers communicate by telephone calls. This may be explained by the fact that Slovenians prefer a more individualistic, rational and direct verbal approach, which can be achieved by the use of e-mails, than Serbians, who prefer more emotional, highly contextual communication and a non-verbal approach (Magun 2011; Hlepas 2013; Klopčič et al. 2016). The same can be applied also to face-

to-face communication and telephone communication, which allows personal focus used by the voice.

Although studies on managers' use of social media (Men 2014; Men/Hung-Baesecke 2015; Men/Tsai 2016) show that managers in the USA and China have begun to intensively communicate with employees using internal social network sites, such as Facebook, managers in Slovenia and Serbia very rarely use these communication channels. This may be explained by the well-known fact that managers in this region relatively conservatively introduce new communication channels in internal communication.

The results also show that employees seem to prefer receiving information from top managers by e-mail and telephone calls and not face-to-face communication, which is, however, most frequently used by them. Communication with top managers causes stress for the majority of employees (Reiman 2011) and they may, therefore, prefer telephone communication that allows more distanced communication.

Employees seem to prefer receiving information from middle managers by e-mail and telephone calls which are also the communication channels most commonly used by middle managers. They prefer using the same channels to communicate with frontline managers. Thus, the results show that the channels through which employees prefer to receive information from managers at all organisational levels are e-mail and telephone calls, the latter mostly from frontline managers, followed by middle managers and lastly from top managers. They prefer to receive information through e-mails from middle managers, then frontline managers and at last again from top managers. Technological development has made e-mail an indispensable part of employee-managers communication routine (Men 2014 a) and all studies in this field confirm that e-mail is among employees' most preferable communication channels (Bryne/LeMay 2006; Men 2014; Men/Hung-Baesecke 2015; Men/Tsai 2016). In contrast with other studies' findings which revealed that employees prefer face-to-face communication channels (Bryne/LeMay 2006; White et al. 2010; Men 2014; Holmin/Safarova 2015), our respondents prefer to communicate with managers by telephone calls, which allow them on the one hand a person-to-person, highly interactive, confidential, and safe communication, and on the other hand, a more distanced and quicker two-way conversation without time-consumption as time pressure is a key element of daily business communication (De Paola/Gioia 2016). In this region, employees seem to prefer a more distanced communication approach to communication with managers than employees in the USA (Bryne/LeMay 2006; Men 2014) and Scandinavia (Holmin/Safarova 2015) due to the existence of a more hierarchical and power distanced business communication style (Magun 2011; Hlepas 2013; Klopčič et al. 2016).

Comparing satisfaction with managers' use of communication channels between Slovenia and Serbia, we find out that that there is a significant correlation between the country and the satisfaction with managers' use of telephone calls and e-mails. Slovenian employees seem to prefer to communicate with managers at all organisation levels through e-mail, Serbian employees through telephone calls. Thus, our hypothesis is not entirely confirmed, as Serbian employees prefer telephone calls and not face-to-face communication as we presupposed. Serbian employees seems to prefer more emotional, interactive, spontaneous, contextual approach with an exchange of subjective views (Magun 2011; Hlepas 2013; Klopčič et al. 2016), enabled by telephone communication, which, however, allows more distanced and time convenient communication than face-to-face communication. In Serbian businesses, smart phones are also more frequently used than in the Slovenian environment (Dolšina/Boštjančič 2014).

Surprisingly, social network sites and other digital communication channels are not Slovenian and Serbian employees' favourite channels. This may be explained by the fact that their companies have not yet fully integrated digital media into employee communication and relationship cultivation, probably because they still consider them as a new communication tool, and the fact that in Serbia, according to a survey conducted on 300 respondents, even 88% have manners to always or almost always address directly to the person responsible if something is important to consider, and they consider it as one of the prerequisites of effective communication (Mihailović/Kovacević 2008). Most Slovenian (Zupan 2016) and Serbian companies (Kovacević/Pavlović/Šutić 2008) still have a low digital index.

Employees' satisfaction with managers' communication channels was found to demonstrate a positive effect on employee-organisation relationships. Employees tend to feel more satisfied with the organisation when their managers use more telephone calls and e-mail to communicate with them. The effects were moderate and strong, which means that employees prefer interpersonal mediated communication.

The present study contributes to the literature by presenting the results of the first study on the satisfaction of employees in Eastern Europe with the communication channels chosen by managers who are working at different levels and the effects of the managers' use of communication channels on internal relationships. However, like all empirical studies, the present study also has its limitations. The main limitation is that we focused only on the perspective of employees and used an online survey panel, which may be subject to common source measurement errors. Future studies should further include the perspectives of managers at different organisation levels. The study focused on communication channels, so future studies should focus on the communication content as well. This study reveals subtle cultural differences between employees' satisfaction

with managers' communication channels, however, it does not uncover the reasons behind these differences. Therefore, future studies should examine why these differences exist.

6. Conclusion

Our findings provide implications on how to optimise managers' channels to cultivate communication that positively affects employee-organisation relationships. Pragmatically, the study shows that managers should use more e-mail and telephone calls to communicate with employees. Although existing literature shows numerous positive effects of managers' use of social media on employee-organisation relationship, Slovenian and Serbian managers very rarely use these communication channels. Therefore, findings about the vital role of social media in internal communication should be presented to Slovenian and Serbian managers, they should be encourage to be open minded, to embrace the changes and use new technological tools to develop symmetrical communication.

The study also implies that there is a significant difference between Slovenian and Serbian employees' satisfaction with the managers' selection of communication channels. Slovenian employees prefer to receive information from managers through e-mail, Serbian through telephone calls. Although Slovenia and Serbia as Eastern European countries belong to the "high-context culture", there are some differences in business communication. In the future, it is, therefore, necessary to study differences between the countries considered by the existing scientific literature as the same culture.

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