



Communicating Virtually in Intercultural Business Workplaces: The Case of Algerian Contexts

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Abstract:

In our huge globalized and interconnected world, virtual communication has become a basic method to enable employees and business partners separated by long distances to collaborate, negotiate, and deliver projects. In this regard, many business companies in Algeria are currently conducting their business via internet. This paper examines the necessity of using technology in Algerian intercultural business contexts and explores the challenges that Algerian firms may face when communicating virtually by adopting a quantitative approach. The results showed that the quality of internet and miscommunication rated as the most common obstacles encountered by the workers. It was also revealed from the findings that employees asserted that technology and internet are considered as key elements in accomplishing many virtual business transactions.

Keywords: *Algerian business contexts; business companies; internet; technology; virtual communication.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

As global business depends on intercultural communication, this latter is mostly based on the use of technology and internet. Thus, intercultural communication is a form of communication that happens among a group of people from different cultural backgrounds, interacting and sharing knowledge with each other. In this respect, businessmen should be aware of the others' cultures, beliefs and values in order to interact effectively with customers and foreign clients. Accordingly, intercultural communication obtained a huge importance in business success and growth (Washington et al, 2012). Likewise, respecting people's different cultural backgrounds leads to better understanding on how to act and establish business deals. However, a lot of people fail to understand the cultural diversity of others which may affect not only their communication but also their business. Besides the failure of intercultural communication because of the inability to comprehend people's different cultures, there is also the technological factor that has both positive and negative influence on intercultural communication in virtual environments. Obviously, the globalized world is in a growing demand of the use of technology due to its significant usefulness. Thus, virtual communication becomes more and more required particularly to facilitate completing business transactions between overseas countries. Further, virtual communication is a form of communication that depends on the use of technology and occurs among individuals from different cultures, time and places. As a result, the use of technology as well as the internet decreases long distances and time, (Chen, 2012). During difficult periods such as diseases and lockdown (COVID-19), people and organizations around the world depended on the use of technology and internet in order to communicate and to accomplish business communications. Hence, virtual communication had an important role in bringing people from different corners of the planet closer. In this context, the aim of this paper is to explore the necessity of using technology in the Algerian intercultural business settings on the one hand, and to examine the challenges that Algerian firms may face when communicating virtually on the other hand.

II. Literature Review:

The topic of virtual communication and its major barriers has been the focus of many researchers. For instance, Balau and Dimitrascu (2019) found through a self-administrated questionnaire sent via email that misunderstanding rated as the most common challenge that occurs in virtual intercultural communication in organizations. They explained that misunderstanding may occur due to the lack of employees' abilities of intercultural communication in the virtual world. Moreover, they suggested to improve employees' interpersonal and virtual intercultural skills through specific trainings. Another study conducted through the use of online-interview by Krawczyk-Brytka (2016) identified five (05) main challenges that commonly happen in intercultural virtual teams which are: (language barriers, differences in time and zones, poor language skills, technical and cultural problems). For this purpose, the authors see that the development of employees' intercultural and language abilities can be reinforced through a solid training ensured by experts in global virtual teams, and this can be beneficial for employees as well as their organization.

In the same regard, Ale Ebrahim et al (2009) dealt with the factors required for effective virtual team in intercultural communication as well as the challenges that arise in online environments. The study showed that many key factors are crucial for 12 key factors that are crucial for virtual communication effectiveness including training programs for virtual team managers in order to enhance communication abilities and to overcome different cultural barriers and conflicts. Moreover, Nydegger (2010) discussed the challenges in virtual teams and found that mistaken

opinions and perceptions cause problems among virtual team. Accordingly, the researchers recommended to pay attention to important factors that contribute to a successful virtual communication which are (technology, HR policies, training and development, standard organizational and team process, appropriate organizational culture and effective leadership).

Furthermore, and through in-depth interviews with (20) experienced virtual team and different members of (14) organizations located in Canada and Quebec, Pare & Dube (1999) raised three (03) basic challenges that face virtual team which are (building virtual team, keeping the synergy flowing and monitoring the work of team members). Moreover, they noted that managing a virtual team is regarded as the most common challenge that arises in intercultural communication. They suggested a comprehensive framework for virtual team in the organization that brings valuable insights on how to manage virtual team members and challenges. Correspondingly, Srivastava (2020) investigated virtual communication issues through business transactions in the workplace. This scholar suggested that focusing on trust and collaboration contributes to the improvement of virtual team performance. She added that organization should plan and create strategies in order to reach its potential goals and to foster employees' interpersonal skills. Consequently, it appears that dealing with intercultural business situations requires the consideration of a variety of factors.

III. Intercultural Communication in Business Contexts:

The field of science and technology is dynamic, therefore many multinational companies around the universe should follow the new updates in order to achieve virtual communication for business purposes such as long/short term projects. Moreover, virtual communication occurs among virtual team that includes people who are physically and virtually different. In other words, virtual team according to Morrison-Smith & Ruiz (2020) "is collaboration that is geographically diverse depends on the use of technology in its cooperation and communication" (p.01). Virtual communication, then, minimizes business relationships between the global companies around the world. Further, new technological innovation permits not only global companies to compete in the global market, but also the small companies to advance noticeably. Consequently, technological cooperation brings to the market new business deals as well as products with less funds and time. All the virtual communication's activities rely on the internet's quality and its speed, (Uzun, 2014).

Uzun (2014) noted that "many important companies have already renovated their websites to adapt to the emerging tendencies in using the internet", (Uzun, 2014, p: 2408). Thus, the good quality of virtual communication depends on the speed of the internet. In order to achieve a successful virtual communication, essential elements should be available such as different equipment of technology. With the use of the internet, virtual communication became much easier where people from different languages and cultures are gathered via virtual locations for work, study, and social interactions. As a consequence, the internet is regarded as a crucial component for any type of virtual contact and its role cannot be ignored especially in this era of digital revolution. Moreover, linguistic and cultural knowledge are important for accomplishing different sorts of virtual communication. The use of technology in virtual exchanges increases the organization's performance, and boosts employees' involvement in intercultural workforce. In addition to that, the English language played a key role in facilitating distance communication between alien partners.

Virtual communication, however, faces different challenges among people who do not share the same language and culture. Some elements such as language barriers, cultural diversity, slow-speed internet, technical problems, ambiguity, misunderstanding, miscommunication and

conflicts are regarded as the most common difficulties that occur through virtual communication, (Krawczyk-Brylk ,2016). Language barriers influence negatively employees' performance in virtual business meetings and conferences. As a result, multinational companies as well as employees from different language backgrounds frequently face difficulties in understanding each other due to the poor language abilities that impact negatively their communication process. Consequently, employees fear of being misunderstood by foreign partners. In the same vein, Genkova& Osnabruck (2016) noted that: "... country-cultural specialists also manifest in virtual collaboration and lead to misunderstanding and conflict" (p. 174). Besides, misunderstanding leads to another negative factor which is miscommunication. Moreover, ambiguity in intercultural communication creates cultural and language challenges that affect negatively the employees' written and spoken language as well as communication skills, Shachaf (2008). On the other hand, cultural diversity impacts not only employees' performance, but also their business with foreigners where conflicts can occur because of issues related to culture, beliefs and values. Cagiltay et al (2015) argued that "one major problem facing multicultural CMC teams is that team members are not generally aware of their own cultural values". (p.07).

As virtual communication depends on the use of technology and internet, organizations as well as employees should be aware of how to use new technological equipment. Also, since technological innovation and internet facilitates the transmission of messages and information easily across the planet, business companies are highly recommended to equip their staff with strong skills in this area. However, it should be noted that slow-speed of the internet certainly influences negatively employees' virtual communication process. This means that the bad quality of the internet can interrupt the conveyance of the appropriate information to foreign partners, and can cause possible detriments to already scheduled business endeavors. Apparently, the quality of the internet varies from one continent to another. Algeria for instance, is still working hard to improve the quality of the internet to reach the satisfactory universal level. It needs to be acknowledged that business relationships could be affected and even damaged due to the underprivileged quality of the internet.

IV. Analysis: The data was analyzed through the use of tabulation process.

Table (1): The frequency of using virtual communication in the workplace

Options	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
Number	03	05	06	01	0	15
Percentage%	20.00%	33.33%	40.00%	6.67%	0.00%	100%

According to most employees' answers (40%), business virtual communication is sometimes conducted with foreign partners. An amount of (33%) stated that communicating via internet occurs often between overseas countries. Further, a small number of employees (20%) mentioned that virtual communication is always used; however, only one case noted that its utilization is rare (6.67%).

Table (2): The most common technological tools used in the company

Option	Video-conferences/meetings	Zoom- chats	Skype	Video-call	Total
Number	10	02	03	0	15

Percentage%	66.67%	13.33%	20.00%	0.00%	100%
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The obtained results reveal that Video-conferences/meetings (66.67%) are rated as the most common technological tool used in the workplace. Skype (20.00%) was the second employed tool, and zoom chats (13.33%) was the last technological means used by companies' employees. None of the workers seems to make use of video-call (0.00%).

Table (3):The employees' degree of satisfaction with the internet connection quality

Option	Very-satisfied	Satisfied	Not-satisfied	Total
Number	04	05	06	15
Percentage%	26.67%	33.33%	40.00%	100%

Table (03) illustrates that the majority of employees mentioned their dissatisfaction toward the internet's quality. Moreover, (33.33%) of them stated that the quality of the internet is acceptable. Except (26.67%) of the participants expressed their high satisfaction with good internet connection.

Table (4):The necessity of using technology and internet in the virtual business communication transactions

Option	Very-necessary	Necessary	Not-necessary	Total
Number	10	03	02	15
Percentage%	66.67%	20.00%	13.33%	100%

The table (04) demonstrates the utility of technology and internet in business intercultural contexts. Thus, (66.67%) of employees reported that technology and internet are very necessary for virtual business communication transactions. Moreover, (20.00%) of them emphasized of the necessity of technology and internet. Yet, (13.33%) of the informants maintained that the use of technology is of no need to accomplish business deals.

Table (5):The common challenges faced in intercultural virtual environments

Option	Mis-communication	Lan-barriers	Cultural issues	Conflicts	Internet Low-speed	Technical problems	Total
Number	05	03	01	0	04	02	15
Percentage %	33.33%	20.00%	6.67%	0.00%	26.67%	13.33%	100%

Table (05) reveals the major challenges that arise through virtual intercultural business communications in the workplace. Miscommunication (33.33%) rated as the key issue that employees face when conducting virtual business communication with foreign partners. Internet

low-speed (26.67%) rated as the second challenge in the virtual context. Language barriers (20.00%) are regarded as the third hinderance. Technical problems (13.33%) and cultural issues (6.67%) appear to be the least cited ones.

Table (6):Employees' virtual business communication inabilities in the workplace

Table (06) displays employees' lacks regarding business communications skills via the internet. It reflects that poor communication abilities (40.00%) are seen as a real weakness mentioned by employees. Moreover, lack of interpersonal skills (33.33%) rated as the second inability that hurts the process of intercultural communication. Additionally, insufficient digital and technology knowledge (20.00%) is considered as the third crucial lack. Only (6.67%) of the respondents declared that they were unable to choose the appropriate technological tool.

Table (7):Suggested solutions to overcome virtual intercultural business communication barriers

Option	Number	Percentage%
Intercultural Specific Trainings	05	33.33%
Interpersonal Skills Development	02	13.33%
Language Skills Improvement	01	6.67%
Digital and Technology Trainings	03	20.00%
Communication Abilities Development	01	6.67%

Option	Number	Percentage%
Poor Communication Skills	06	40.00%
Lack of Interpersonal Skills	05	33.33%
Insufficient Digital and Technology Knowledge	03	20.00%
Inappropriate Choice of The Technological Tool	01	6.67%
Total	15	100%

Hybrid Workplace Strategies	03	20.00%
Total	15	100%

Table (07) represents some proposed solutions for intercultural business communication challenges in the virtual context. Employees agreed that improving their intercultural skills (33.33%) through specific trainings is the most important solution to overcome cultural barriers. Moreover, they asserted that they need to strengthen their digital and technology knowledge (20.00%) with the assistance of global specialist and Information Technology experts. Furthermore, interpersonal competencies development (13.33%) is considered as crucial for employees to deal with overseas business clients and partner. Additionally, language and communication abilities enhancement (6.67%) are seen as the less important component. Hybrid workplace strategies (20.00%) are regarded as the accurate method that can facilitate their work and that can help them be updated on technological innovation.

V.Methods and materials:

This paper deals with exploratory research that investigates the necessity of using technology in the Algerian business companies and explores the main challenges that employees encounter when communicating virtually with foreign partners. The study adopted a quantitative approach. The (15) participants included (10) males and (05) females. Their age varied (from 25-40). They occupied different positions in the company such as (accountant, purchasing manager, Human Resources director, etc.). To obtain useful information, a questionnaire was addressed to (15) employees working in a multinational company located in Oran. The questionnaire was written in English and translated into French. It comprised different questions (open-ended, optional questions, multiple choice, etc.). This data collection means contained three main sections (personal information/ educational and professional background/ the importance of technology and the issues related to intercultural virtual communication). Within it, 15 questions were asked to have profound insights on employees' intercultural communication performance and to gain clear and valid data. Our study was based on the process of tabulation to measure the percentage (%) as well as the quantity. The process of tabulation is a simple and easy tool that facilitates the measurement of varied quantities and its transfer into detailed percentage. This work is based on the following research questions:

1. What is the principal role of using technology in virtual communication in the Algerian business transactions?
2. What are the main challenges that the Algerian business companies may face while communicating virtually?

VI.Results and discussion :

This research revealed two main findings. First, the Algerian company uses technology occasionally to accomplish its virtual business transactions with foreign partners. It indicated also that technology and internet are regarded as two critical constituents in the success of intercultural business communications. Second, the main obstacles that the company and its personnel encounter in the virtual environments include miscommunication and the bad quality of the internet.

As many countries around the world, Algeria depends on the use of technology and internet to accomplish virtual business exchanges. In this regard, the results showed that the use of technology and internet is very necessary (66.67%) for achieving the company's business operations. Consequently, the majority of respondents agreed that our globalized world requires the adoption of new technological devices and instruments to simplify the virtual business meetings. They also claimed that internet is a pivotal means particularly in the computer-generated environment, and that the use of innovative technological tools is very advantageous for accomplishing business deals. Supporting this viewpoint, (66.67%) of employees stated that

video-conferencing/meeting is the most common instrument implemented in the virtual business communication because according to them it decreases distances, saves money, and augments productivity. Besides, they mentioned that Skype (20.00%) is a useful and familiar tool for conducting different business virtual meetings with foreign partners. Furthermore, few participants (13.33%) generally do not use zoom chat as a virtual instrument. However, video call (0.00%) was the non-employed means. As a result, the informants depend on one common technological tool which is video-conferencing / meeting in their virtual activities because it is viewed as the appropriate solution particularly for difficult situations (COVID 19) and replaces face-to-face communication. Additionally, video-conferencing/meeting is characterized by its numerous options such as exchanging and sharing virtual presentations, discussing online projects, recording meetings and conferences, etc.

In order to obtain a smooth virtual communication, two main factors should be available namely, technology innovation and good quality of the internet. This research disclosed that the bad quality of the internet (slow-speed) causes communication issues. Therefore, (40.00%) of employees express their displeasure of the internet quality because Algeria is still working to enhance the quality of internet and communication services. Moreover, (33.33%) of the participants who took part in this research showed their satisfaction with the quality of the internet. But, only (26.67%) of the respondents contended that the quality of internet was really agreeable. Conducting virtual communication via a bad quality of internet with foreign partners leads to communication problems (interruption, ambiguity, misunderstanding and miscommunication) and impacts negatively business deals. As a result, one of the main challenges that employees face through virtual communication is miscommunication (33.33%) because of cultural and language diversity that occur during virtual business communication. Thus, differences in culture and language create issues in terms of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. As already revealed, internet-low speed (26.67%) is rated as the second most common issue that hurts virtual business interaction, frustrates the workers and discourages the customers. Moreover, language barriers (20.00%) are rated as the third challenge that impacts negatively virtual business communication as well as employees' feedback. Poor English language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), lack of business vocabulary and expressions lead to ambiguity as well as misperception. Furthermore, technical problems (13.33%) create challenges in the virtual business transactions because of the employees' lack of technology and digital knowledge. Also, cultural issues (6.67%) can lead to conflicts among virtual teams which influence negatively the business relations with foreign partners. On the other hand, employees' intercultural inabilities in the virtual space are regarded as a serious problem because it disturbs and damage the process of communication. Hence, the study revealed that poor communication skills (40.00%) are the main lacks that employees suffer from. The lack of interpersonal skills (33.33%) impacts virtual team's flexibility, collaboration and adaptability. Furthermore, insufficient digital and technology knowledge (20.00%) are an important reason behind technical problems caused when performing virtual business transactions. Additionally, the inappropriate choice of the technological tool (6.67%) creates technical issues when the chosen instrument may not be suitable for the intended business project's requirements which leads to misinterpretation that in one way or another harms the process of communication and causes a waste of time and money.

VIII. Conclusion:

Intercultural business communication through the virtual world became a necessity to perform several tasks related to professional purposes in multinational companies. Thus, the present study examines the necessity of using technology in the Algerian intercultural business context

and explores the main obstacles that Algerian firms may face when communicating virtually. As a result, the study demonstrated that the use of technology is very necessary for guaranteeing virtual business communication. Moreover, the main issues that the Algerian workplaces may face when communicating virtually are miscommunication and internet-low speed (the quality of internet). The use of technology particularly in our highly connected world became vital due to its importance in linking countries from different cultures, languages, time and zones. Furthermore, technology as well as internet are very advantageous in difficult periods such as (COVID 19) when people were unable to travel or even to go outside for work. Besides, businessmen can save a lot of money and time when conducting their business deals virtually. Through technological innovation tools, they can effortlessly discuss, present, create, plan and arrange professional meetings with the use of new options and applications. However, there are many barriers that may emerge in the virtual world. According to the research's results, "Miscommunication" and "Internet-low speed" are the basic hurdles that the Algerian firms meet. Miscommunication occurs due to many reasons (Poor language competencies, cultural differences, employees' lack of interpersonal skills, employees' weak digital and technology knowledge). As a result, the objectives of virtual communication cannot be achieved if only one of the mentioned reasons appears. The bad quality of the internet can also hurt the process of remote communication. This signifies that when the internet speed is low, listening problems and ambiguity can happen and may have negative influence on grasping clearly the information, and on responding on time to the customers' and partners' requirements

In order to overcome the cited difficulties, some recommendations are suggested. For a promising intercultural communication through the virtual terrain, the company is advised to offer its employees specific trainings to develop their cross-cultural communication capacities. Moreover, to create an efficacious virtual skill, employees (team's members) need to be equipped with strong interpersonal and language skills that allow them to take right decisions, solve problems, collaborate, negotiate and communicate confidently and efficiently locally and globally. Therefore, improving employees' virtual abilities and language competencies (listening, speaking, reading and writing) is seen as fundamental to conduct successful business exchanges and target suitable populations. Also, to overcome technical issues, the company is strongly required to provide its staff with the necessary digital and technology knowledge by ensuring useful courses covered by external experts and consultants in the Information Technology field. It is important to mention that there is a need to readjust priorities in Algerian business workplaces by reconsidering the basic role of virtual communication in boosting work flexibility, encouraging worldwide collaboration, and increasing productivity.

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