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**Assessing the Impact of Virtual Team Communication Tools on Cooperation in Digital-
Marketing Projects Among Freelancers in Riyadh**

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Introduction

Remote work has gained more popularity over the past few years, and the contemporary work life-style has made it necessary to make the shift to remote work in order to maintain corporate growth and productivity. Research in general indicates that a higher percentage of freelancers have welcomed and implemented remote work. Some organizations, however, were unprepared to accept this new standard of performance. There are a number of issues hindering organizational adoption of remote work in some countries, such as cybersecurity and unpredictable energy supplies (Azasu & Babatunde, 2020). Bahrain, as opposed to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, had the highest percentage of respondents who planned to work remotely in a poll carried out by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Interestingly, the pandemic of COVID-19 has forced the workforce worldwide into a global experiment on remote work, regardless of the readiness of organizations and the inclination of employees. The pandemic crisis and its impact on all forms of work serve as an inspiration for this study. Particularly in this era, where the field of IT has magnificently developed, and organizations commenced to use the project-based methodology to complete their business duties, with communication management being of utmost importance.

Communication is crucial for everyone affected by and active in the freelancing industry. According to Ashley (2019), proper and effective communication as well as wide application of virtual team communication tools can influence freelancing success; however, it is a challenging dynamic process for most freelancers. The same notion is supported by Sulbout & Pichault (2022), who, in their study, concluded that the success of freelancing is correlated with the effectiveness of the management of communication. Upwork is a good example in terms of being a freelancing platform, where businesses and professionals interact and exchange

information effectively via the platform. The sudden, unprecedented change in the working environment and communication platforms has added to the profits of the freelancing company by increasing 12% to 19% in only a quadrant of 2019 (Karthirugan, 2020).

Muszynska (2018) has also maintained that the effective communication management is the essence of a project, and it is more than essential to the success of the freelancing management. Understanding the needed methods and styles of the communication system is vital for the success of any project taking place in a remote work environment. Nevertheless, at its core, any type of communication is ineffective unless it achieves its intended aim. Similarly, there is a plethora of metrics by which to evaluate the efficacy of conversation.

However, this study will solely focus on evaluating the impact of virtual team communication technologies on collaboration in digital marketing projects among freelancers in Riyadh, capital of Saudi Arabia. This study will also present the results of a questionnaire that will be administered to the marketing freelancers, who work in an environment that is primarily support online and remote work.

Definition of terms

The term "virtual team" refers to a combination of individuals who work together digitally while being physically located in different and geographically distant places, which makes it either impossible or more difficult to hold meetings in person. Some companies may decide to deploy remote teams due to its being efficient in terms of international commerce or other circumstances that prevent their employees from meeting in person (Argote et al., 2023).

Freelancers

On the one hand, there are numerous varieties of remote teams, including parallel teams, networking teams, and freelancing teams, to name but a few. On the other hand, the majority of this research will focus on individuals working in freelance teams. A freelance team is a collection of independent contractors working together to complete a project. It is not uncommon for the freelancer team to have a variety of skills and expertise, and the freelance team members are normally specialized in particular aspects of the task(s). The members of the team are free to delegate responsibilities to one another and to focus on their own projects. Also, accountability and cooperation are typically understood as part of their agendas. Freelancers are typically employed by businesses to fulfill certain requirements because those teams enjoy capabilities that the hiring organization does not have access to internally (Freelance Team, 2022).

Research Problem

The accessibility of virtual communication comes with a number of challenges in terms of coordination and collaboration, and this affects the generation of new ideas among the virtual team members, which nevertheless affects the productivity output (Dang, 2018). In addition, the potential for freelancers to feel isolated while working in their remote areas bring in the issue of social isolation (Bollestad et al., 2022), emphasizing the need to constantly adapt to new technologies, maintain a work-life balance, not to mention the difficulty of coordinating tasks among a large number of freelancers (Lisefski, 2019). Utilizing these contributions effectively is crucial and could assist companies in coming up with creative solutions to these issues.

Importance of Research

This study will significantly contribute to identifying the challenges that freelancers face in virtual communication, developing evidence-based solutions, mitigating all risks that may

arise as virtual team freelancers adopt virtual tools, and resulting in effective collaboration among freelancers.

Research Hypotheses

In remote work environments, accurate and timely information transmission is positively connected with project success and freelancer satisfaction.

Litereature Review

Any organizational communication strategy would impact the managerial effectiveness, and it serves as a key link to sustainability (Arop et al., 2018). On the other hand, Ismail and Yaser (2019) define communication in freelancing as the reciprocal sharing of information and processes to create a platform that is understandable for freelancers. For everyone involved in freelancing activities, communication is key to make successful outcomes. Conversely, ineffective communication management may lead to project failure as well as excessive expenditures, postponement and freelance team conflict. For freelancers, the secret to effective business management in virtual communication is the iron triangle, which combines the three most crucial project-management variables: cost, time, and quality.

The Social Presence theory proposed by Bruce Christie, Ederyn Williams, and John Short in *The Social Psychology of Telecommunications* (Williams & Christie, 1976) explains how well the participants' presence is fundamental during the process of communication. According to the Social Presence theory, various media can convey different outcomes, including nonverbal clues, such as eye contact, body language, facial emotions and vocal intonation, and this would provide the impression that an audience is participating. However, the degree to which this is achieved varies. For example, compared to other media, videoconferencing and the telephone have a higher social presence. Thus, this makes them more appropriate for relational communication tasks like building and maintaining interpersonal relationships, which inevitably involve talking about social and personal issues and ideas (Williams & Christie, 1976). In virtual communication among freelancers, the consideration of receptive and available traits impacts the timeliness of information (Shakeria & Khalilzadeh, 2020). Receptivity is demonstrated by the accuracy of the message's interpretation and the actions that follow. For the communication cycle to be deemed

complete, the recipient of the message must verify receipt (Karl et al.,2021). In simple terms, communication is never complete in case someone communicates and there are no responses. Reliable and timely information is essential for freelancers to complete their daily obligations. Information is useful for making plans and decisions, mitigating risks and monitoring progress. Shakeria and Khalilzadeh (2020) claim that the efficacy of a freelance team is contingent upon the information that is received and shared. Since decisions are often based on what is currently known, the ability of the virtual freelance team to complete tasks efficiently is increased when timely, reliable information is provided methodically (Rajhans, 2018). Team members could find it challenging to disseminate information quickly enough if they have a lot going on outside of scheduled sessions. Inadequate planning, work habits, unforeseen work requirements and information creation challenges are just a few of the variables that might cause information to be shared outside of its intended timeline (Oh et al., 2018). Delays in communicating information can have major detrimental effects, as stated by Agrawal et al. (2023). According to Rajhans (2018), a prevalent kind of miscommunication in stakeholder relationship management is information delay, which has an adverse effect on the success of freelancers. One common and unavoidable communication issue in a remote work setting is information-sharing delays. Misunderstandings resulting from inadequate information led to poor relationships among independent contractors (Rajhans, 2018). According to Muszynska (2019), the virtual freelancing team should adjust communication management during the freelancing activities. Through honest communication, freelancers can create a feeling of purpose that unites them to share knowledge and work toward shared goals (Pirju, 2018). According to Rahjans (2019), teams of virtual freelancers operate more effectively when their members regularly supply accurate and

up-to-date information. Consequently, this raises the probability that freelancers will finish their work on schedule and improves the overall team performance.

This theory also goes into great detail in terms of shared documents and other project collaborative tools, which makes it possible for freelancers from all over the world to collaborate on the same project. In an ideal world, freelancers and contributors would collaborate in real-time. According to Gupta et al. (2020), these technologies promote active participation and presence on both sides in all facets of freelancing. They also support the development of a communal online workspace that fosters a sense of community among distant workers. The social presence theory states that since most freelancers have improved their communication skills, their teams are more cohesive. Williams and Christie's (1976) social presence theory concurs with the constantly changing Transactional Model of Communication, which sociologist Dean C. Barnlund proposed. Information is exchanged in both directions during communication between the sender and the recipient. For virtual teams operating in the digital market, the communication solutions of freelancers are essential because they facilitate the sharing of project data and procedures. According to Bragg (2021), a transactional model of communication makes it easy for people to identify a wide range of potential obstacles to cooperation amongst geographically independent contractors.

According to Battisti et al. (2022), it is not achievable to predict that every single new and existing freelancing employee will be in possession of all of the necessary tools and applications and this acts as a challenge. Furthermore, the theories need to take into account the particular communication characteristics and preferences of individuals. That being said, some freelancers are extroverted, and they likely have a higher output than those who are introverted. When all of these variables are addressed within a virtual team, the communication hurdles and

obstacles that are encountered are reduced. As a result, the activities that are associated with freelancing will be effective.

Methodology

The research design for this study will be a cross-sectional survey administered using a questionnaire. It applies a quantitative research methodology. Furthermore, questionnaires will be preferred for this research since they are affordable, quick to complete and uncomplicated, resulting in precise prevalence estimates for risk variables and outcomes (Parvathi, 2024). The sampling frame will be picked using the random technique. This study will concentrate on individuals who operate remotely as freelancers across various Riyadh districts. To avoid sampling bias, the sample size must be large enough. That being stated, we will deliver questionnaires to 140 freelancers, using a random sample approach for data collection in Riyadh. The questionnaires will be distributed via online messaging services, such as Facebook, Instagram, WeChat, WhatsApp and IMO. This is convenient due to the large size of social-media platforms and their user-friendliness, as well as its privacy, which makes data harvesting more efficient. After responses are sent, the system is set to update automatically. SPSS will be used for the analysis. The main objective is to ascertain the impact of virtual team communication platforms on the collaboration of freelancers stationed in Riyadh on digital marketing projects.

Research limits

Although the study demonstrates the significant impacts of virtual team communication technologies on collaboration with regard to digital marketing initiatives among Riyadh-based freelancers, it is crucial to acknowledge several research limitations. Firstly, the results may need to be more generalizable to other regions or types of freelancer locations since the research only

included freelancers in Riyadh. In addition, most of the data that will be analyzed in this study would only come from questionnaires that participants will fill out independently, which might introduce bias in their responses. Another possibility is that the sample size of approximately 140 freelancers needed to be bigger to capture the variety and complexity of virtual team dynamics encountered in digital marketing campaigns. Moreover, time frame is another limitation since the research is expected to be conducted under a period of around one month and this might not cover all the different locations of marketing freelancers. Future research could address these limitations by examining the pros and cons of virtual team communication platforms for collaboration in other organizational contexts, using a more diverse sample, and employing a range of data collection methods.

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