Deep.

Module: Digital Communication

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1.1.1. Overview

People have been delivering and receiving thoughts, ideas, and knowledge through communication as long as mankind exists. Today the most widely used communication form is the digital one. As defined, this is a type of communication in which information/ thoughts/ ideas are encoded digitally and are transferred electronically to the receiver. As the 90s began, we've started a global digital transformation that formed the societies as we know them today. Indeed, the technological revolution is a relevant part of the new economy, and in this context, communication strategies and mediums change fast and adapt to the industrial needs. That's why digital communication is valuable for business. It allows companies to collaborate more effectively with their target groups, cuts their costs, and enables entry into the global market. In other words, the emergence of digital communication has influenced how businesses conduct their internal and external communication.

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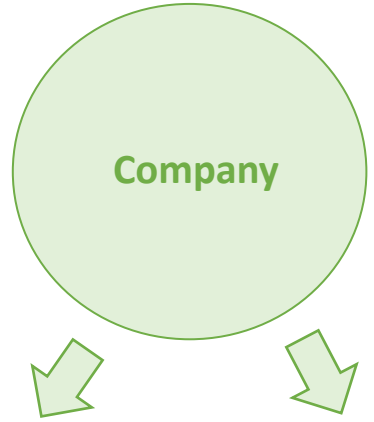
1.1.2. Business communication

➢ Depending on what audiences the business communication is aimed at, it can be internal or external.

Internal Communication	• the exchange of information between the employees, managers, and owners in a certain organization, and, therefore, it is vital on each level of the start-up's management.
External Communication	• How the business communicates its advantages and values with the wider world (the customers, the general public, the competition, and external stakeholders).



Internal Communication
- Employees
- Managers
- Owners

External Communication
- Suppliers
- Stakeholders
- Society
- Customers
- Competition

→ Considering the recent steps into global digitalization, owners and managers of the businesses had to adapt to the new changes, including communication. The popularity of the advanced tools for online collaboration has shaped internal digital communication (Lipiäinen, Karjaluoto, and Nevalainen, 2014) and impacted how companies started to influence and engage their customers.

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1.1. Unit 1: The basis of digital communication

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E-mail is the most common and easy way of communication, especially in business contacts. It is convenient and cheap. Also, you can use it in a formal, semi-formal, and informal way of expression. Regardless of e-mail type, you should remember the 3 Ws rule, which may help you in maintaining clarity of the content.

The rule of the 3-Ws means:

Who? Who is the recipient of the message? ("Dear Adam") Who is the sender of the message? ("Kind regards, Anna") Who else should you inform in the message? (For example, by adding in the CC people involved, directly or indirectly, in the topic and introducing them briefly in the text).	**What?** What are you writing for? (Make it clear in the subject line of the message and repeat in the first sentence). What do you expect from the recipient of the message? (Write it clearly, put it in bullet points, use colors and bold to make it easier to understand). What should be the first step after receiving the message?	**When?** By when do you expect an answer? (Also add whether the response should be sent by email, or perhaps you prefer a phone call). When is the topic/project you write about in your email due?

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1.1. Unit 1: The basis of digital communication

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E-mail

The different types of emails:

- Semi-Formal Email
- Formal Email
- Informal Email

Your email must have: Subject, Salutation, Content, Conclusion, Closing, Signature

The subject of the e-mail is important because many people filter messages looking for keywords in this line. Keep in mind that the receiver won't see the long topic, especially on the mobile app. In this case, creating shorter subjects (3-4 words) or writing keywords at the beginning is crucial.

Also, remember that by the wrong subject your e-mail may be qualified as spam by mailbox' algorithms. Mailbox providers like Google (http://gmail.com) or Zoho (https://www.zoho.com/mail/) have advanced systems of keeping unwanted e-mails away from you and your receiver. Even if your message won't be read by the algorithm as spam, the unattractive subject can prevent the receiver from opening the e-mail.

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E-mail

The salutations, of course, depend on the relationship of communicators. You may know the receiver very well or write him/her for the first time. In the second case, you should stay formal. After receiving an answer (or a few) you will get to know better the second person and his/ her communication style. Thanks to that, you both may agree to some more or less formal communication.

The content/ body of the e-mail should be short and clearly explained. Don't waste the time of the receiver. Research shows that the average user receives around 90 e-mails per day — there is no space for long, unnecessary descriptions.

The conclusion of the message should be separated from the body. Point out the clue of the message using keywords. You can bold them or use a different color. Try to avoid red — it can be read as an act of aggression. Your conclusion should include CTA (Call To Action) — a short, usually imperative, persuasive phrase calling your receiver to the next step,

e.g.:

- ✓ Please send me examples of these products.
- ✓ Please read all attachments.
- ✓ Please sign the paper before Friday and send me a copy by e-mail.
- ✓ I need to know more about your business — when can we talk?

Moreover, research shows that the phrase "Thank you in advance!" at the end of the e-mail increases the possibility of receiving a positive answer.

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E-mail

In business (formal) communication, the signature usually has 3-4 lines and includes the title, name, last name, position, organization, and phone number of the sender (Ilieva, 2020).

Generally, e-mails are one of the most frequently used tools of external communication. Thanks to them, you can:

- start and keep professional interactions
- support marketing (Harvey, 2018)
- promote products and services (e.g. through the newsletter creating on Mailerlite https://www.mailerlite.com or MailChimp https://mailchimp.com)
- write to your customers (and — on the other hand — they can start the communication through e-mail with your company whenever they want).

E-mails are also beneficial in the internal communication inside the company. Having a team, you need to take care of the flow of the information and documents between all members. In the early stage of the company, you don't have to invest in apps — start with e-mail.

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1.1. Unit 1: The basis of digital communication

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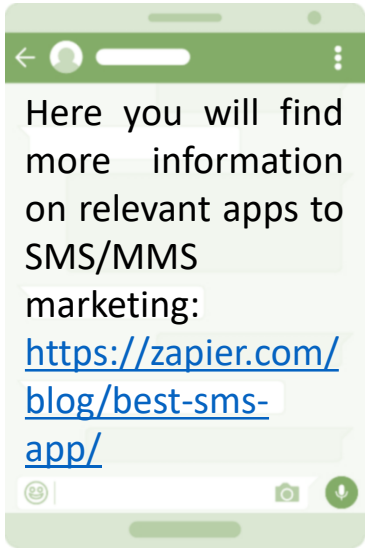
Text messages

- Sending SMS (**Short Message Service**) is a fast and cheap way of contacting clients, employees, vendors, and carriers. This way of communication is effective because you can use a certain number of symbols. Of course, you can build a longer message — then a few SMSs will be accumulative in one longer thanks to advanced features of mobile devices. Also, you can attach links, sounds, and images (in this case, you will send MMS — Multimedia Message Service).
  - You can use SMS/ MMS exactly like a newsletter — to promote your product/ services. You can engage your clients in interactive activities such as games, contests, and polls or just inform them about news and promotions. You can build communication by SMS/ MMS via:



TextMagic: https://www.textmagic.com
SimpleTexting: https://simpletexting.com

*Prices start from few cents per text.

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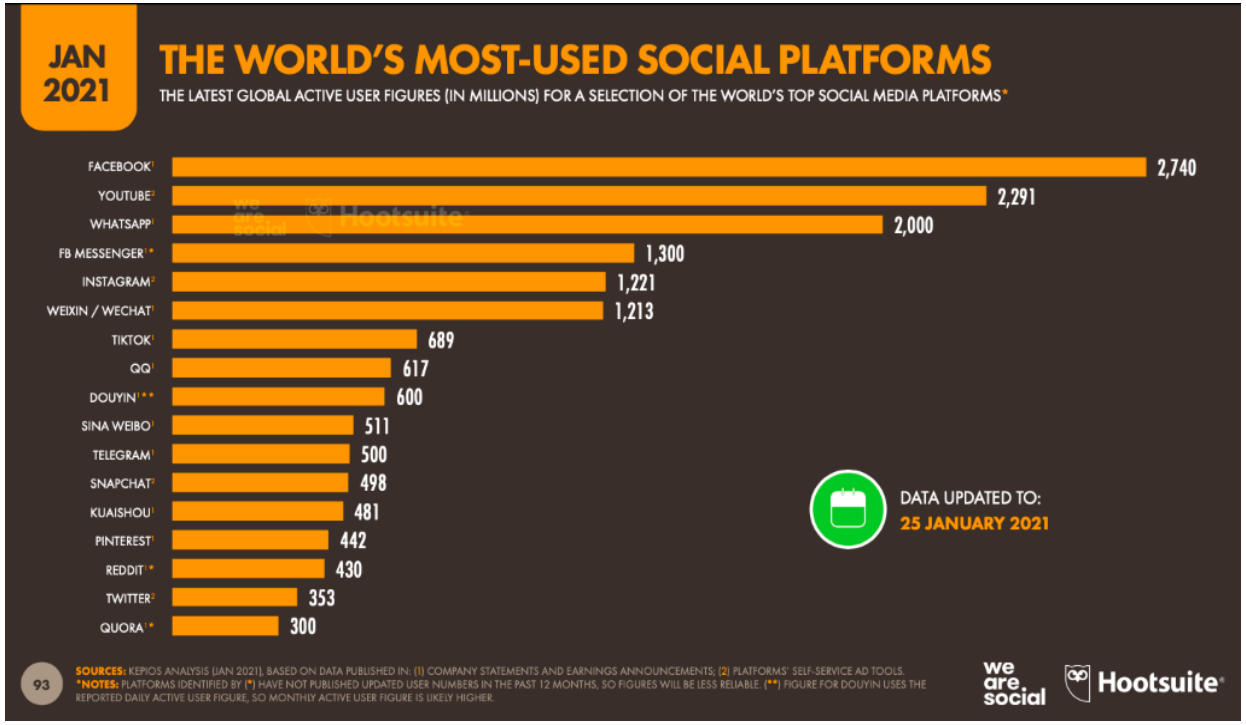
Instant Messenger

Many different apps are gaining popularity in a given time, location, or for various generations. According to the Global Report by Hootsuite and We Are Social, in 2020, the most popular were WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and WeChat.



Source: Digital 2021 — Global Report by Hootsuite and We Are Social (https://www.hootsuite.com/resources/digital-trends)

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Instant Messenger

You can use instant messenger both in internal and external communication. By internal channel, you may easily and quickly inform your team about urgent cases, changes, and meetings. On the other hand, you can create an internal lifestyle channel to build relations. On this channel, team members can share photos from vacations, the best apple pie recipes, and "meet" together on the videocall to drink a cup of tea during a break if they don't work in the same office.

By external channel, you may create an exclusive communication channel with selected customers.

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Social Media

Social media (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.)

Social media allow you to create and maintain a strong relationship with your customers. Before you start, you need to choose the best media channel and build the strategy fit for your audience.

Example: The Global Report by Hootsuite and We Are Social shows that the median number of times each month that Facebook users click on Facebook ads is 23 (Denmark), 21 (Italy), 19 (Portugal), 18 (Belgium, Poland), 15 (France), etc.

Comparing that with stats concerning age and sex of users you are able to decide if Facebook is the best option in your country, in the specific audience to target an ad, invest your money and promote your product or service.

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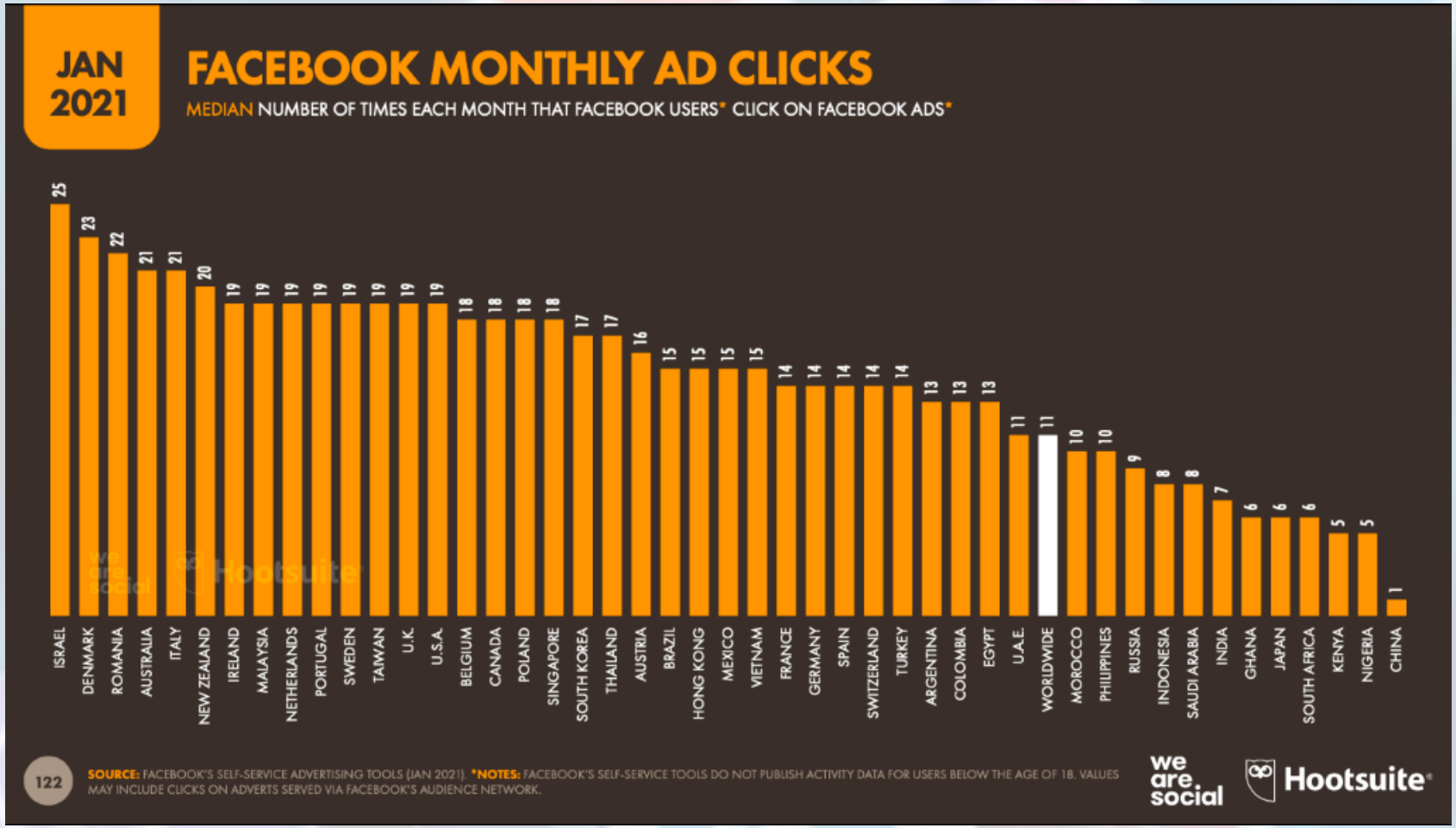
Social media



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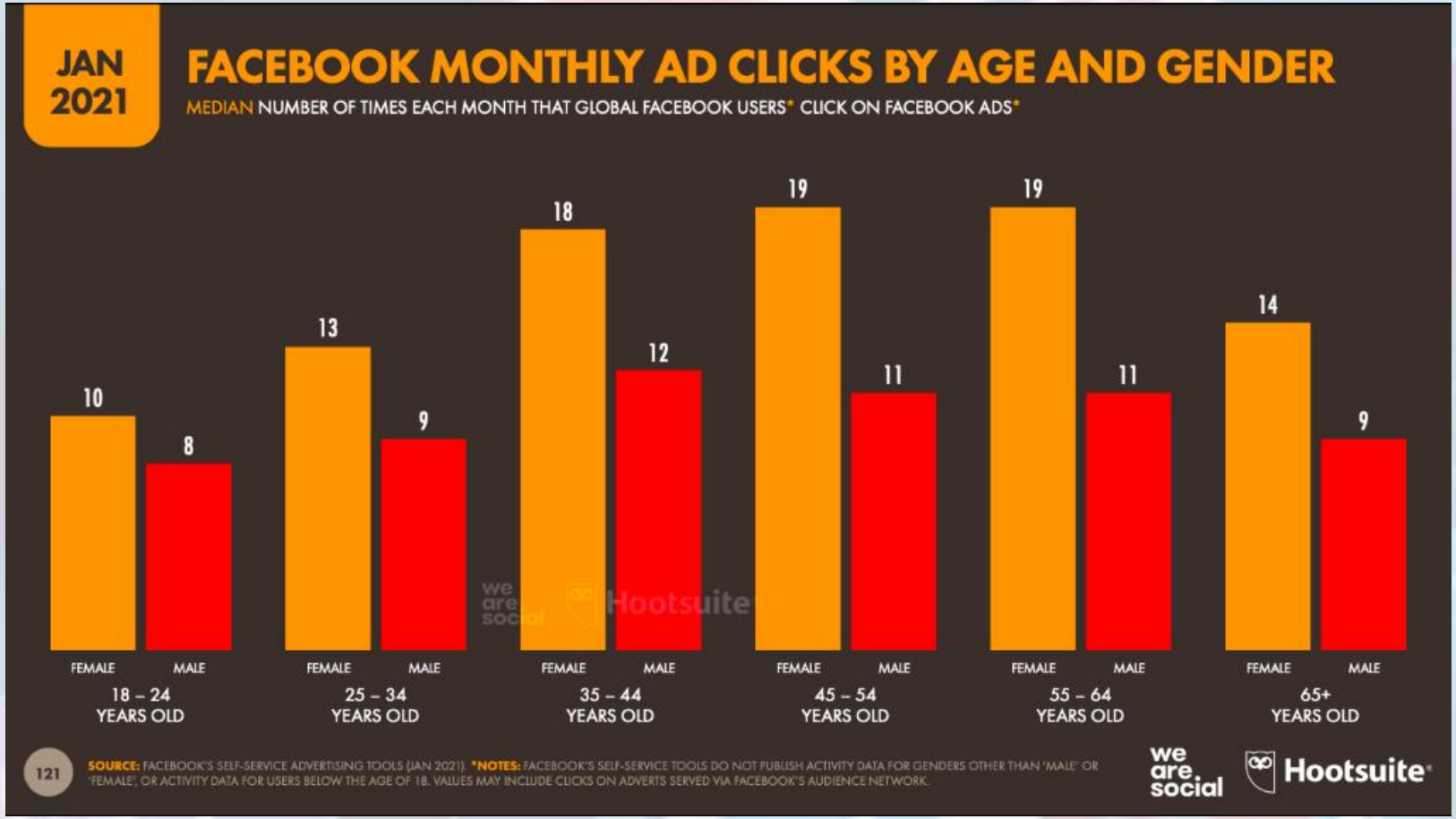

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Social media

Of course, you can (or rather: should) use social media to strengthen your market position and build a relationship not only with customers but also with business partners. Social media are actually the best way to engage clients in the process of developing new products (Polańska, 2014), communicate data, and learn more about the clients through available stats (Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014).

Social media make communication easier and faster. You can offer effective and instant customer services on Facebook or Instagram, without your own e-commerce interface and website. Your customers are already inside the app, ask questions waiting for answers in comments below the posts/ videos/ photos or by using messenger (Harvey, 2018).

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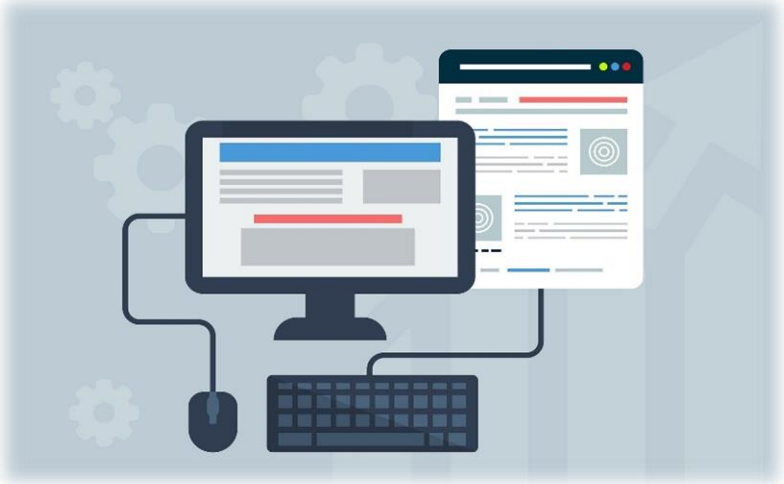
The website of the start-up

- The website of the company can be a great channel to build and sustain external communication. On the company's website, the customers and stakeholders can learn more about its activities and products/ services (Harvey, 2018).

- However, to build an attractive, responsive, and intuitive website, you need to be an experienced webmaster or invest in the project. The second option could be complicated in the first months of operation, as you have just started, business capital is limited, and you need to validate your idea.

- So first, start from a fan page on Facebook, a business website on Instagram, or a LinkedIn website. In social media, you will find everything: attractive, responsive, and intuitive interfaces, your audience, and stats — and you can validate your idea for free.



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1.1. Unit 1: The basis of digital communication

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» **Phone Conversations**

➢ The most common way of having a conversation remains the phone call. When you make a formal phone conversation, first plan it and inform your interlocutor about the main goal and the agenda.

You can follow those steps:

1. Describe the main goal in a short sentence. You may add additional goals as points.
2. Prepare the agenda of the call step by step in 2-4 points. The agenda should be clear for you and your interlocutor. "Speaking about the most important things" is not clear enough. Use keywords understandable for both of you that make that easier to stay on the topic.
3. Send all the above by e-mail, chat, or another channel that you and your interlocutor use. That information needs to be visible for both of you before and during the call.
4. Prepare yourself to take notes. You can use shared notes like Google Docs on Google Drive to share all information in the real time.
5. Sum up the meeting and prepare the next steps.

You can also check free apps from Google Workspace that may help you to manage all business calls, both internal and external:
https://support.google.com/a/users/answer/9283047?hl=en

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Videoconferences

- A conference call is a video or just audio connection made through an app like MS Teams, Slack, Zoom, or thanks to the featured of mobile devices (e.g.: Face Time on iOS), and instant messengers. According to Forbes survey, 80% of the managers consider that videoconferences are becoming more and more popular, while 92% of the persons claim that this type of communication affects their efficiency in a positive way (Ilieva, 2020).

- Some researchers believe that in the future video calls will replace audio conversations (Ilieva, 2020). Of course, phones disappear from the office desks, discussions are more dynamic thanks to the instant communication. The quality of the Internet is better and better, also the mobile one, so you can call wherever you are, whenever you want. Additionally, you can not only see other people, but also share a screen, media, live streaming, and so on.

- However, video calls are not only more engaging but also more exhausting. way of communicating. By using a video connection all the time, you won't be more effective in communication. Leave this form at the end of the process, after writing exactly what and when needs to be done, and after the audio call which is less exhausting.

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Videoconferences

- Considering internal digital communication, Microsoft Teams is the most commonly used platform because it is user-friendly, and it works with Office 365 and its accompanying apps (Excel, Word, SharePoint, etc.). Moreover, taking into account the needs of users (also new in the online environment) in a pandemic, changing reality, MS Teams is constantly upgraded (read more in “4 Reasons Why Microsoft Teams Is the Best Collaboration Software for Businesses”, n.d.).

- Another popular business communication tool is Slack. NASA, Harvard, and the Times UK use it for internal communication. Slack — exactly like MS Teams — is based on creating teams and channels that are the basis for communication and collaboration. This tool is perfect for start-ups and small businesses because you can integrate other apps (e.g.: Google Drive, Office 365) (Anderson, 2016).

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Videoconferences

Microsoft Teams

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Slack

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1.1.4. Unified communications as a standard

- Nowadays, there are multiple forms of communication available on the market thanks to advanced apps and device features. We can not only hear each other or write SMSs but also build an extended structure of internal or external communication using instant messengers, social media channels, websites, video conference apps, etc.

- You should keep in mind that it is quite normal that communication trends are created by users. So first, before you invest your time and money, check where are your users (customers or team members) usually spend time communicating. Read researches (e.g.: early global report by Hootsuite and We Are Social publishing always at the beginning of February), stats on Facebook, and ask people.

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1.1.4. Unified communications as a standard

- Nowadays, application designers strive to create systems so universal that a user can find all necessary functions in one place. Nevertheless, gathering all these things, like writing, calling, sharing docs, and marketing activities, in a single device/ system, is not that easy and requires efforts that led to the phenomenon called Unified Communications (UC) (Ilieva, 2020).

- The usage of Unified Communications can reduce costs and enhance staff work (Ilieva, 2020). An example of a Unified Communications System optimizing business processes is Google Voice. It is based on voice communication and allows the transcript of voicemail to text. It offers recordings of calls and conferences. Another example is Microsoft Teams. It unites functionalities such as video calls, conferencing, messaging, etc. ("The Importance of Unified Communications in Business and Marketing", 2020).

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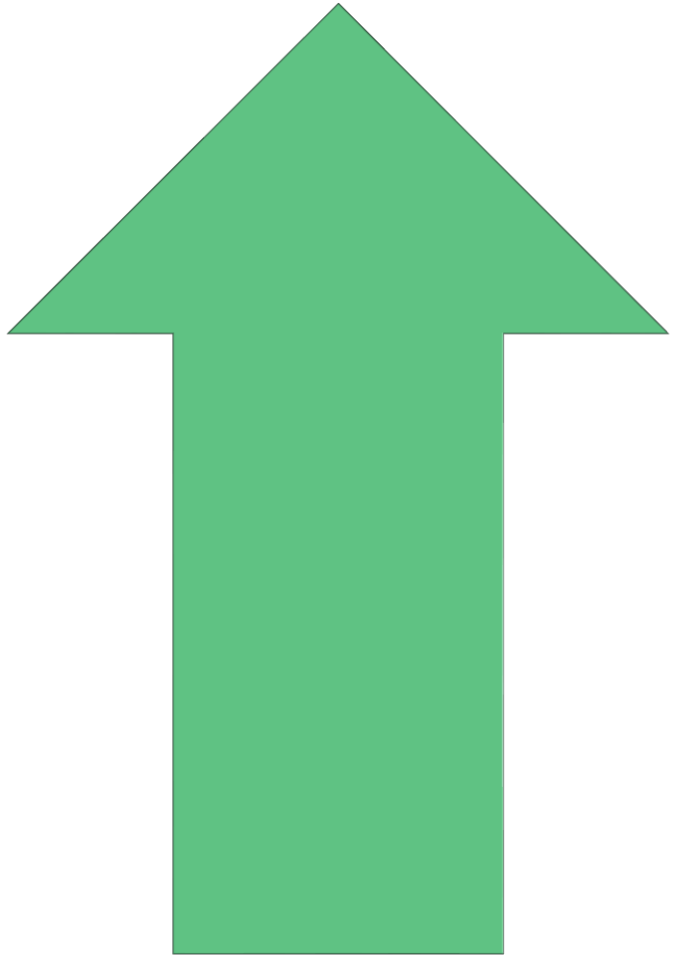

PROS

» **24/7 Accessibility**
Internet is available almost everywhere and is accessible through various devices. It makes communication easier and faster than ever before. Digital communication diminishes the physical boundaries between businesses and customers and allows their 24/7 interaction (“10 Pros and Cons of Online Communication for Business”, 2018).

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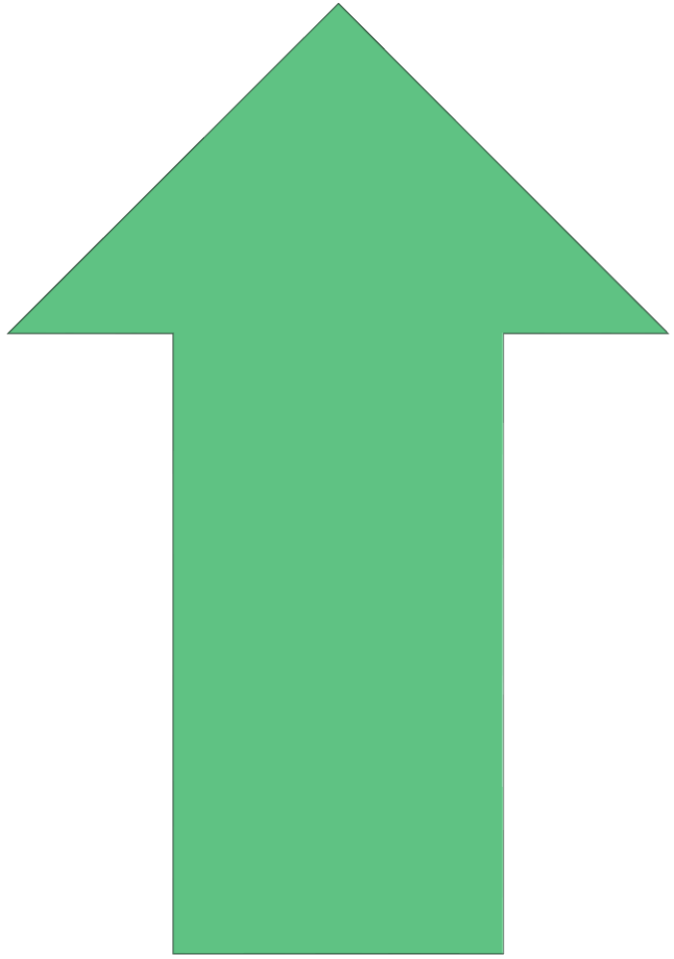

PROS

» **Communicate through many devices**
Digital communication is faster and more effective because we can connect through any device having access to the Internet. The opportunity to reply to anyone from every part of the world by using your smartphone makes digital communication more beneficial in internal and external relations than face-to-face interaction ("10 Pros and Cons of Online Communication for Business", 2018).

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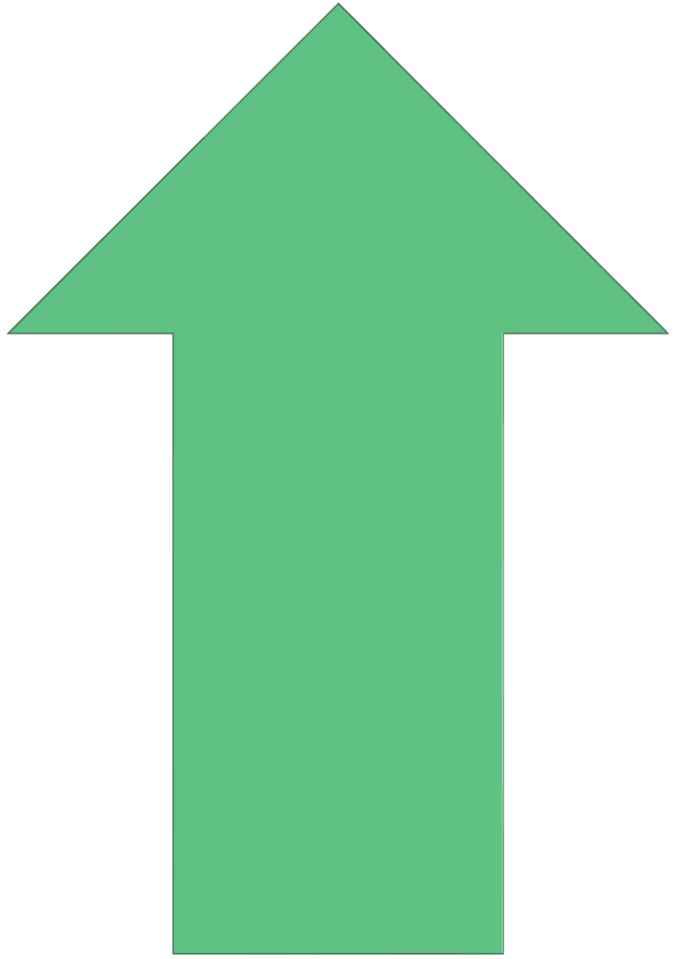

PROS

» **Easy to document and file**
Digital communication is easy to organize. You can record the call, keep all files in one place, and discussions to follow up. It may be beneficial during long projects to find something in history on chat, rewatch video from the meeting to remind bullet points, etc. (“10 Pros and Cons of Online Communication for Business”, 2018).

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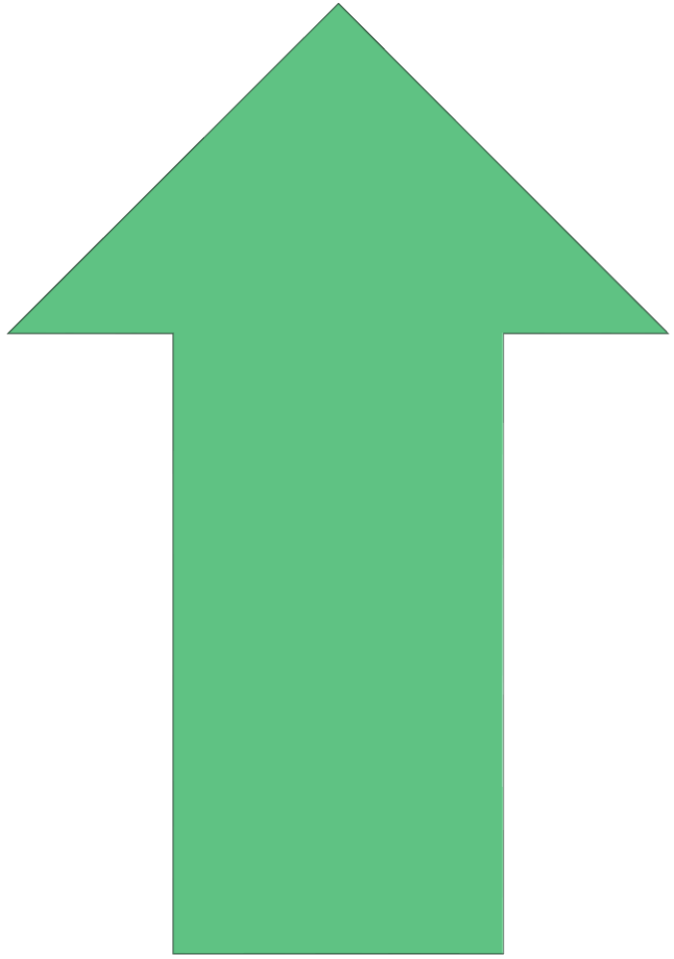

PROS

» **Enhances the quality of interaction**
Digital communication improves the quality of the conducted collaboration. Your team members and customers have more time to think before replying while using e-mails, MS Teams, Facebook comments, even instant messengers than when you talk face-to-face (“10 Pros and Cons of Online Communication for Business”, 2018).

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CONS

Digital communication is changing rapidly to be more intuitive and more effective. However, you should remember some cons that users might face.

» **Problems with the internet connection**
Without the Internet, there is no digital communication. Before you engage your interlocutor in an audio or video call make sure that both of you have access to the stable and fast Internet. Also, in case of connection problems, prepare plan B, e.g. phone call ("10 Pros and Cons of Online Communication for Business", 2018).

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CONS

» **Lack of face-to-face contact**
During written online communication, you can't see the facial expressions of the other person, you can't hear the intonation of the voice. In consequence, you can miss the point of the message. It may be harder to build trust. You can solve some of these problems using audio and video calls (“10 Pros and Cons of Online Communication for Business”, 2018). However, remember that digital communication is a kind of agreement between interlocutors choosing a tool, frequency and tone of messages.

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CONS

» **Postponed Reply**
You can experience this disadvantage, especially in written digital communication. It can be uncomfortable to wait few days or even weeks to receive a response to an email (“10 Pros and Cons of Online Communication for Business”, 2018).

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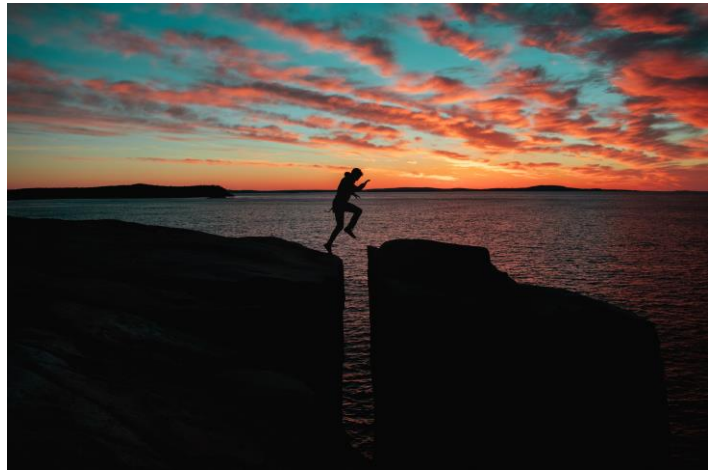
What are the main obstacles?

One of the main obstacles that digital communicators face is technical problems. You can have issues with the software, hardware, or network. In the less optimistic scenario, one or both interlocutors may be unfamiliar with technology. Then, if there is no technical support beginner digital space explorer can feel uncomfortable and lost ("Advantages and Disadvantages of Video Conferencing", 2017).



If you have just started your journey with some app or social media channel, test it with your team members or friends to make sure that you find and understand the most important functions.

Remember that some people may have difficulties staying engaged and focused throughout the entire online meeting, especially if it takes 2 or more hours. Take care about breaks every 45 or 60 minutes. Communicate those breaks are for everyone to go to the toilet, make a tea or take a deep breath outside.

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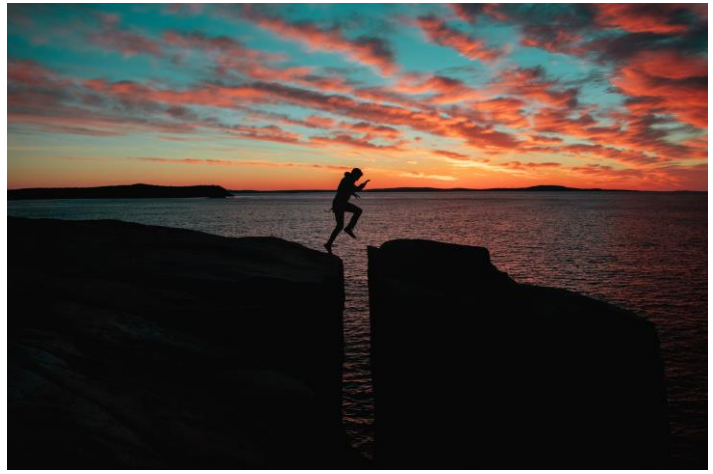
1.2. Unit 2: PROS and CONS of Digital Communication

Deep.

How can we benefit from digital communication?



The biggest benefit of digital communication is breaking boundaries: temporal, geographical, demographic, ethnographic, etc. You can have meetings anywhere, at any time, and with anyone. Although online meetings are shorter, they are usually more effective. Travel costs are reduced to a minimum when you choose a video or audio conference (“Advantages and Disadvantages of Video Conferencing”, 2017). The most important — you don't have to invest a huge amount in communicators and websites since you can find free plans of MS Teams and Slack, a free fan page on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

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1.3.Unit 3: What do you need for an effective digital communication?

The third unit provides you the skills and knowledge necessary for effective digital communication.

Deep.

1.3.1. Set of skills

- Since digitalization enables us to communicate more than before, we should learn how to transmit information effectively and clearly. Nowadays, in the (post)pandemic reality, companies from all around the world cooperate with digital skills professionals to improve internal communication. The hard and soft digital skills of the whole team are crucial.

- Hard skills regard technical knowledge, and soft skills concern personal characteristics ("Hard Skills vs. Soft Skills", 2020).

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1.3.Unit 3: What do you need for an effective digital communication?

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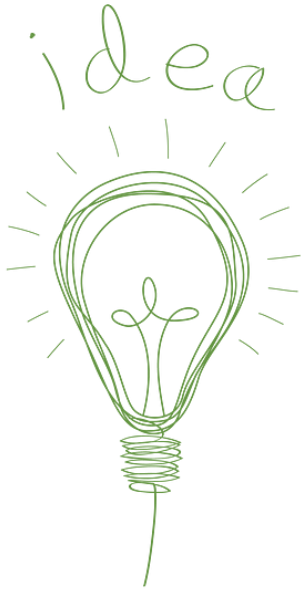
» **Hard Skills**

- Hard skills can also be called practical skills. In the field of digital communication, they regard competencies like effective use of social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, etc.), how to use software for editing, video conferences, etc. Most importantly, this type of skill can be learned/ acquired with a bit of practice (French, n.d.).



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1.3.Unit 3: What do you need for an effective digital communication?

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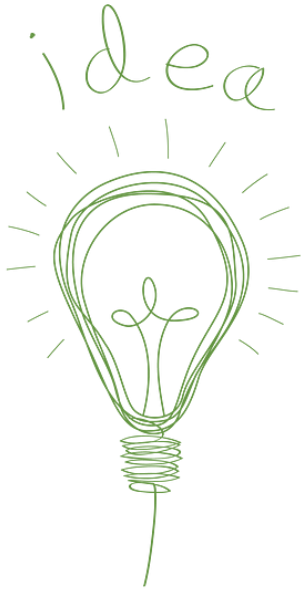
» **Soft Skills**

- This type of skill is more complex as they concern the personal characteristics of the individual (French, n.d.). Below you can find descriptions of some soft skills that can be beneficial for the successful realization of digital communication (Doyle, 2019):



- Flexibility is extremely important for digital communicators because this type of communication requires adaptability to changes (Doyle, 2019).
- Lifelong learning is another soft skill that online communication requires. In this field, the changes are rapid and constant, and you need to be always ready to adapt to updates (Doyle, 2019).
- Curiosity and the desire to gain knowledge of the people and channels of digital communication are what distinguish the best in this field (Doyle, 2019).

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1.3.Unit 3: What do you need for an effective digital communication?

1.3.2. Necessary knowledge

The quality of our writing is extremely important. Your style of writing is a content provider. Of course, your writing should depend on the audience that you target the message (Samuels, 2019).

» **Writing**

The quality of our writing is extremely important, and it is an eminent part of the content we deliver. Also, our writing depends on the audience we are targeting, should be structured clearly, and logical (Samuels, 2019).

» **Knowledge management**

Knowledge evolves not only with the help of technological advancements, research, and ideas but also with the growing number of sources of information that vary in terms of trustworthiness. It is valuable to learn the knowledge management that is featured by identifying, analyzing, and diffusing information (Bates, 2019).

» **Social media**

Without social media, you won't create any business today. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram are changing every day. To observe updates, you need to be an active user not only as an entrepreneur but also as a follower of other businesses (Bates, 2019).

» **Technology**

Not only specialists working in IT need to know new technologies. In the XXI century, apps and online tools are almost everywhere. No matter where you work and what you do, you should get comfortable working with technology (Harmon, n.d.).

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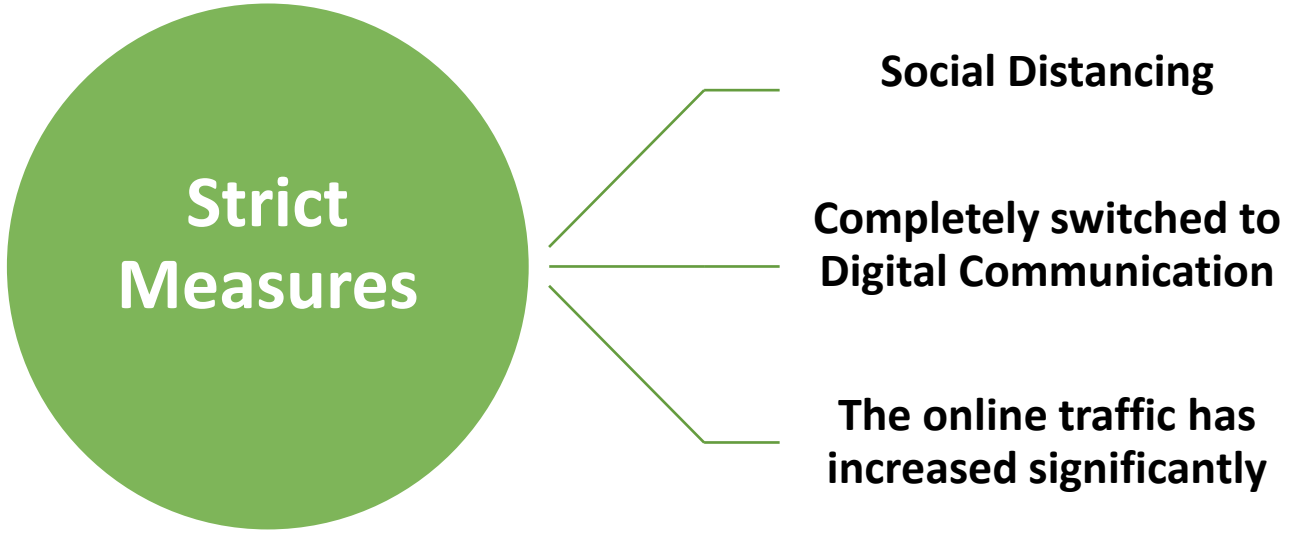
1.3.Unit 3: What do you need for an effective digital communication?

Deep.

1.3.3. How it is affected under the pandemic circumstances caused by Covid-19?

» The COVID-19 pandemic that emerged at the beginning of 2020, has speeded up the digital transformation of the world. The social distancing completely transformed our everyday lives, digital communication strategies, and how businesses function



» The actions that have been taken to stop the spread of the virus, have tested the extent to which the operators and OTT (Over-The-Top) communication services can implement innovations and adapt to the transforming demands. In 2020, most customers completely switched from face-to-face to digital communication. In consequence, online traffic has increased significantly.

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1.3.Unit 3: What do you need for an effective digital communication?

Deep.

1.3.3. How it is affected under the pandemic circumstances caused by Covid-19?

Many providers have eased the limitations in the free services. For example, Zoom has abolished its limit of forty minutes, Google Duo rose the number of people who can participate in a group call from 8 to 12, Viber doubled the number of users who can take part in a group call from 10 to 20, etc. (Sinibaldi, 2020).

Moreover, apps and tools developers started to facilitate the usage of their products and services. Since there is a new profile of the client, the online beginner user, digital communication needs to be more intuitive than ever before.

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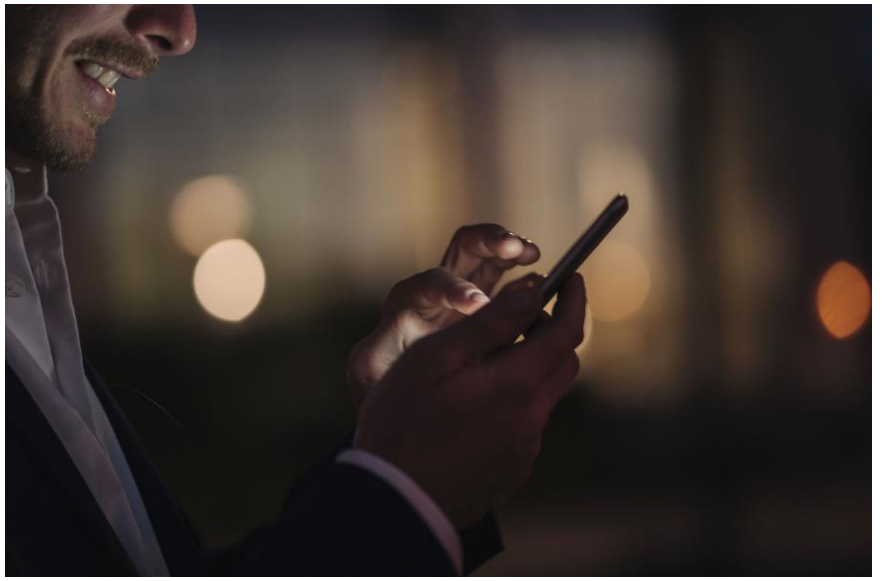
1.4. Unit 4: Importance of establishing and maintaining a network within digital environment

Deep.

Effective networking allows us to establish substantial relationships with other people that can benefit our personal and professional development. On the other side, networking in a digital environment has proven to be even more beneficial because digitalization enables us to uncover, support and supervise the relationships that bring about opportunities.

Indeed, since today the social environment became digital, we have the chance to create and maintain networks all over the world. The limits of face-to-face interaction do not exist and by changing our locations we do not end relations since we can communicate remotely with the help of digital means.



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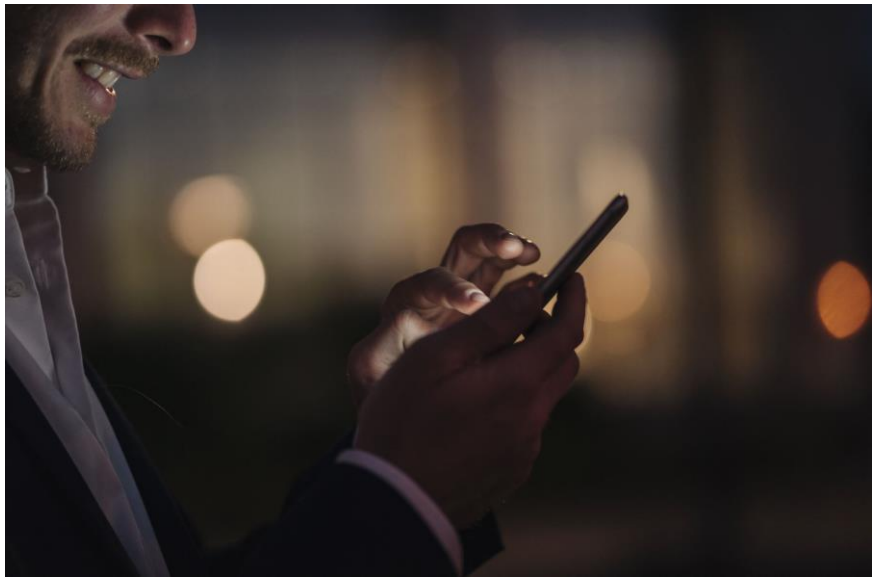
1.4. Unit 4: Importance of establishing and maintaining a network within digital environment

Deep.

Moreover, we are not only more flexible but also can enhance the aspect of variety in our networks by communicating with people from different parts of the globe. By having the chance to connect with persons that come from different countries, cultures and which have different backgrounds, we can see the world through a more globalized perspective.

Furthermore, since the importance of social media platforms is growing in a fast pace, those people who do not make use of digital communication run the risk of isolating themselves and being left behind (Donnelly, 2017).



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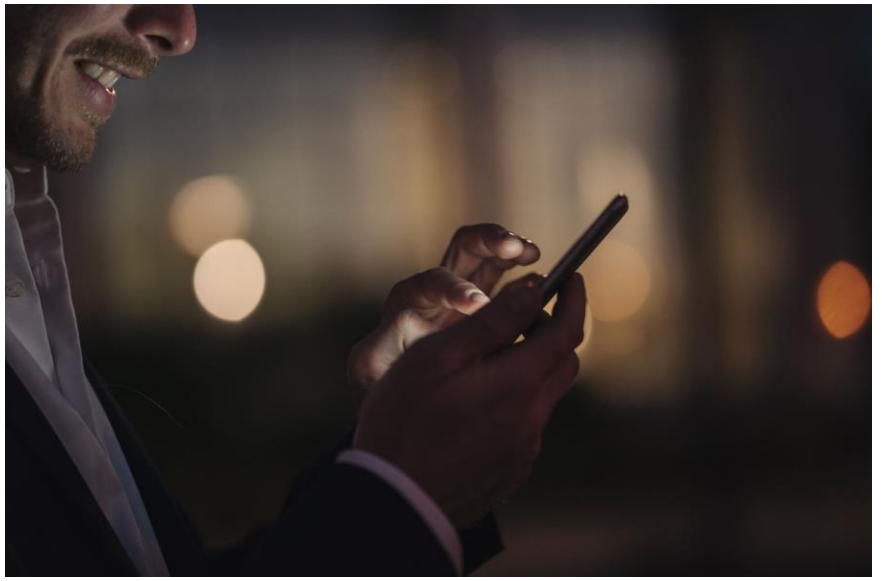
1.4. Unit 4: Importance of establishing and maintaining a network within digital environment

Deep.

Currently, companies are running their businesses and managing their employees online. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many firms have launched or have started to implement new digital strategies. During the crisis which emerged in the last months, the businesses which have started a digital transition managed to adapt to the changing environment.

What became evident is that the communication and cooperation within the organizations should be constantly evolving and adjusting to the external unsettled surroundings (Donnelly, 2017).



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