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A cross-cultural comparison of organizational communication media: an application of media richness theory

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A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION MEDIA: AN APPLICATION OF MEDIA RICHNESS THEORY

A Thesis Submitted to

The Department of Journalism and Mass Communication

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

by Mai Wahid Abdel Kader

B.A. Mass Communication
under the supervision of Dr. Rasha Abdulla
May 2010

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ABSTRACT

THE AMERICAN UNIVERSITY IN CAIRO

A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION MEDIA: AN APPLICATION OF MEDIA RICHNESS THEORY

Mai Wahid Abdel Kader

Media Richness Theory (MRT) argues that within any work organization, the performance of employees and managers improve when using 'richer' media for equivocal tasks. The main goal of this study is to assess the predictions made by Media Richness Theory that richer communication is better for tasks which are perceived to be equivocal. The employees' media selection behavior was assessed in accordance with the MRT to test its validity and application. This study sought to evaluate whether or not the assumptions made by MRT hold across the different cultural settings within organizations by distinguishing between high-context collectivistic cultures and low-context individualistic ones. To test this, a cross-cultural study of 312 employees and managers in Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Tunisia, Bahrain representing high-context collectivistic cultures, and Canada, USA, UK, Germany, France, Czech Republic, and Switzerland representing low-context individualistic cultures was conducted. Based on the results, the applicability of MRT in organizations and across cultures was discussed.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Communication is one of the most dynamic and vibrant fields that are continuously undergoing changes and expansions. Strate, Jacobson, and Gibson (2003) stated that communication is the process by which humans create messages, convey information, and formulate meaning. Communication is the "process of attempting to construct shared realities, to create shared meanings" through social interaction (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 13). It is an endeavor to make others understand our own world and for us to understand theirs in return (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009).

The media are seen as the means and environment through which communication occurs (Strate et al., 2003). There are four distinct types of communication. When the communication process takes place between two individuals, it is called interpersonal communication. When the same process takes place between several persons, it is described as group communication. Public or mass media communication takes place when large numbers of individuals are involved in the communication process, either in a personal manner or through some technological channel. The last type, which is the subject matter of this thesis, is organizational communication, which takes place within organizations (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009).

To a great extent, communication should not be viewed as means to transmit information only, but rather, it includes the creation of meaning and understanding (Alvesson, 1996).

> **In an organizational context, communication is the process through which meaning is created and, over time, sedimented. Communication…articulates meaning formations which, when habitualized…provide the background of common experience that gives organization members a context for their organizing behavior…Organizing is therefore continuously created and recreated in the act of communication among organization members** (Mumby as cited in Alvesson, 1996, p. 40).

Based on the above, communication is critical in creating and formulating organizations, not just reproducing them. In a sense, "communication and organizing are thus in a certain sense facets of the same phenomenon…" (Alvesson, 1996, p. 40).

1.2. Scope of the study

The purpose of this thesis is to assess the predictions made by Media Richness Theory (MRT) that richer communication is better for more equivocal tasks. Throughout the next few chapters, the researcher will discuss and test in details the assumption made by MRT that communication which uses rich channels characterized by providing instant feedback and containing verbal and non-verbal cues are better for more complicated tasks. The employees' media selection behavior will be assessed in accordance with the MRT to test its validity and application. Secondly, the study will seek to verify whether the assumptions made by the MRT hold across the different cultural settings within organizations by distinguishing between high-context collectivistic cultures and low-context individualistic ones. To test this, a cross-cultural study of 312 employees from Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Tunisia, and Bahrain as samples

representing high-context collectivistic cultures, and Canada, USA, UK, Germany, France, Czech Republic, and Switzerland as samples representing low-context individualistic cultures will be conducted.

1.3. Organizational Communication

Communication within organizations is a puzzling yet efficient and productive matter (Muller & Kieser, 2003). Organizational communication is the "process through which organizations are created and in turn create and shape events" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 15). It plays a crucial role in "contributing to or detracting from organizational excellence" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 4). Accordingly, identifying an effective communication medium is an essential factor for organizations, particularly those which operate across cultures (Z. Lee & Y. Lee, 2009). It is, to a great extent, the key to success within any organization. The notion that communication is a central aspect for the success of any organization dates back to 1938, when Chester Bernard, the author of "The Functions of the Executive", mentioned that a chief responsibility of executives is to develop and maintain a communications system. Afterwards, research has linked organizational communications to the overall effectiveness of organizations (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009).

The process of organizational communication has been described as "evolutionary and culturally dependent" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 15) due to its ongoing and permanent change. This ongoing change occurs while planning and executing work, during crisis, and between individuals performing their daily tasks (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009). With careful management, communication can lead to new sources of

performances and productivity (Muller & Kieser, 2003). To make it clearer, organizations, with all their business functions, require proficient communicators to be able to contribute to the organizational success. "Communication systems within organizations – both human and technological – are responsible for solving increasingly complex problems creatively" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 4).

Communication within organizations leads to what is called "Organizational Climate", in other words, the prevailing mood of the organization. The climate within any organization can be described as calm and warm on one hand or turbulent and uncomfortable on the other. There are many factors which supplement the wellness of the organizational climate; however, the quality of the communication is a main determinant as to whether the climate is a positive or negative one. Impersonal and ambiguous messages used within any organization are examples which would lead to a negative climate (Staley II, 1992).

1.4. Message Components

Within any organization, there is always an agreement in regards to the purpose of the message and who is involved. In addition, there is usually a degree of agreement in regards to the direction of the message; that is whether the communication will be one-way from superior to subordinates or two-way. Many organizations as well reach agreements regarding the communication channels. They agree on what they should put into writing or communicate orally, as well as they can discuss the medium to use for communication; fax, e-mail, telephone, or face-to-face. In a way, such agreements tend to lower the risk involved in sending or receiving unintentional messages (Beamer &

Varner, 2001), as well as decreases any potential misunderstandings. Accordingly, for our purpose here, it is significant to discuss three concepts which are pivotal within organizational communication; the channel, the communication direction, and the message type.

1.4.1. Channel

The 'channel', is the means whereby one can transmit the intended message. Selecting an effective communication channel and choosing the content to be transmitted within any organization is a disputable matter (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009). The criterion for selecting the right channel is an essential skill especially when communication is taking place between organizations in different cultures (Beamer & Varner, 2001). There are usually several channels to transmit the different messages; written messages, oral ones, face-to-face interactions, group meetings, presentations, computer-based exchanges, and teleconferencing (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009). "Although most of us take channel use for granted, selecting one channel over another can communicate subtle and important attitudes about both the message receiver and the message itself" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 36).

There are many aspects which affect the channel choice besides the message perception such as the position, technical qualifications, work conditions, and judgments about channel effectiveness. People who are higher in the organizational hierarchy, for example, determine the channels they want to use and what others should use in the communication process with them (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009). E-mails, for example, are considered a primary communication channel, yet their significance differs from one

culture to the other (Beamer & Varner, 2001). Negative news, for example, is to be conveyed through a less instantaneous communication channel most probably, such as e-mail or telephone (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009). "Research suggests that our attitude about the message and our willingness to have contact with the receiver significantly influence the channels we use for communications" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 36).

1.4.2. Message Direction

Researchers explain that there are three main directions for any communication process within any organization; downward, upward, and horizontal. Downward communication describes the message direction that goes from a person of higher authority to subordinate one. Reversibly, upward communication describes the message direction from those who are lower in the organizational hierarchy to the higher levels (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009). Horizontal communication "moves laterally across the organization among individuals of approximately the same level and without distinct reporting relationships to one another" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 37).

1.4.3. Message Type

It can be either verbal or nonverbal. In any conversation, a person tends to listen, as well as scan the communicator's nonverbal cues. The cues sent through the eyes, voice, gestures, and facial expressions are all part of the message. While communicating, any message includes the message content or 'what you say', in addition to the way we say what we say (Staley II, 1992).

1.5. Cultural Perspective

Media technologies in general have a global reach and impact. The cultural and social effects of communication technologies have been subject to continuous studies and debates (Pavlik, 1996). People of "different ethnic backgrounds possess different attitudes, values, and norms that reflect their cultural heritage" (Cox, Lobel, McLeod, 1991, p. 828). Intercultural communication occurs when a message is initiated by a member of one culture and is intended to be understood by a member of another culture. In the instance when a message leaves one culture to be decoded by receipts in another culture, it undergoes an amount of transformation which changes its meaning. In other words, the meaning of the original message changes due to the cultural differences and behaviors of the message receiver which might not coincide with those of the message producer. That being said, it is obvious that cultural diversity exposes us to different experiences and unfamiliar perceptions of the world. Accordingly, in order to be able to understand other people's worlds, we should try to understand their frames of references and perceptions (Samovar & Porter, 1994).

Geert Hofstede, renowned for his works in regards to culture and its measurements, studied and developed measurements of national cultures and organizational values, which generated considerable amount of research pertaining to this area (Rice et al., 1998). In a journal article coauthored by Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, and Sanders (1990), it is stated that "culture has become a fad among managers, among consultants, and among academics, with somewhat different concerns" (Hofstede et al., 1990, p. 286).

In his book "Cultures and Organizations – Software of the Mind," Hofstede explained that the four main cultural values are: individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede as cited in Rice et al., 1998). The validity of Hofstede's cultural dimensions has been generally recognized (Singh, 1990). For our purpose here, and because the individualism versus collectivism dimension influences communication through the different characteristics that individuals learn (Gudykunst, 2003), we will focus on this dimension.

1.5.1. Individualism versus Collectivism

Individualism is related to those societies where the bonds and connections between individuals and everyone else is considered to be loose, and everyone should take care of themselves and their families; whereas collectivism is related to those individuals in societies who are "integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout people's lifetime continue to protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty" (Hofstede as cited in Rice et al., 1998). Collectivists focus on an oral, more personal and two-way communication (Rice et al., 1998). They are more indirect in their communication and are interpersonally sensitive (Gudykunst, 2003). Within the collectivistic cultures, there is an emphasis on the 'we' over the individualistic 'I' (Samovar, & Porter, 1994). Collectivistic cultures also place a strong weight on group needs and collective objectives, shared beliefs, and collaboration between members of the group. They tend to perform jobs which require teamwork, unlike the individualists who prefer independent tasks (Cox, Lobel, McLeod, 1991). In a study by Earley (1993), it was established that individuals from collectivistic cultures have lower performance

when they work alone as their satisfaction is in group outcomes, in addition, group goals and collective actions are of higher priority than their own self-interest (Earley, 1993). They are members of a few general in-groups such as family, work, and university, which influence their behavior to a great extent in the different situations. Individualistic cultures on the other hand are members of several specific in-groups such as social clubs, religion, family, and profession which exert little influence on their behavior (Wiseman, 1995).

Cross-cultural studies have shown that northern and western European cultures, as well as North American ones exhibit characteristics of individualistic cultures, whereas Chinese, Asians, Latins and most of Eastern and Western Africans are collectivistic ones (Cox, Lobel, McLeod, 1991). So countries such as Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Mexico and China exhibit high collectivistic values, while countries like the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands are considered individualistic ones (Samovar, & Porter, 1994).

1.5.2. High-Context versus Low-Context

Individualism and collectivism are connected to the notions of high-context and low-context cultures (Rice et al., 1998). Edward T. Hall created the high-context versus low-context framework that enriches the understanding of the importance of communication within individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Samovar, & Porter, 1994). Hall's approach is suggested for cultures to be understood based on the role of context in communication (Beamer & Varner, 2001). Cultures in general do not necessarily belong to one extreme side of the continuum or another. Low-context communication is identified as being direct in the verbal interactions, overt in expressions, and sender-oriented (Ting-Toomey as cited in Samovar, & Porter, 1994). High-

context communication on the other hand is identified as being indirect in the verbal interactions, contains subtle nonverbal nuances, and interpreter-sensitive (Ting-Toomey as cited in Samovar, & Porter, 1994).

Cultural priorities of direct plan users, who are often low-context cultures, include openness and going straight to the point, which shows consideration for the person receiving the message. Clarity, efficiency, and accuracy are also key factors for them when choosing a communication channel. However, for indirect plan users, who are often high-context cultures, direct messages can seem rude and the sender might be perceived as unfriendly or aggressive. The cultural priorities for the indirect plan users include some sort of deliberate ambiguity and indirectness which is a way to save face in case a request was rejected (Beamer & Varner, 2001). The below figure shows the ranking of some countries according to Hall's cultural dimension.

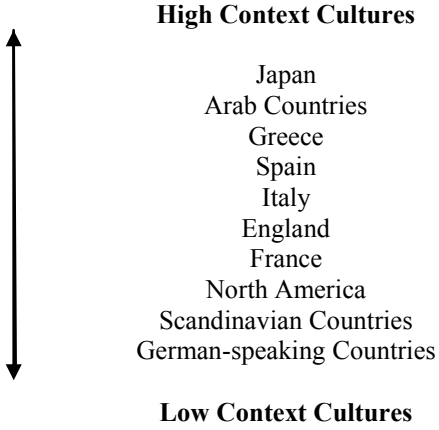


Figure 1.1: High/Low Context by Culture

(Source: as cited in Wurtz, 2005)

To put it straight, there are four distinct differences between those cultures which are high-context and those which are low-context. First, within low-context cultures, verbal messages are important as they are not readily available in the environment. Second, low-context cultures

people are viewed to be less credible by high-context cultures. Third, high-context cultures people are more adapted to reading non-verbal cues and the environment. Finally, high-context cultures individuals expect others to comprehend their unarticulated communication (Samovar & Porter, 1994).

1.6. The Connection between Cultures & Communication

It is essential to understand the connection between cultures and communication to understand how intercultural communication works (Samovar, & Porter, 1994). Accordingly, and based on the aforementioned differences between high-context collectivistic cultures and low-context individualistic ones, it can be stated that individuals from collectivistic cultures would prefer richer forms of media and they would tend to perceive situations to be more equivocal. They might also prefer synchronous media, which provide immediate feedback (Rice et al., 1998). In these cultures, which value relationships more than results, face-to-face channels are used quite often and they tend to rely more on the context to convey their messages where messages tend to be winding and allusive (Beamer & Varner, 2001). They also try to avoid conflicts by maintaining vague communication (Rice et al., 1998). Within high-context cultures, messages tend to be implicit and multilevel and there is a low tendency to put full trust into words, but rather, there is a huge amount of dependence on the context in order to clarify the message (Beamer & Varner, 2001).

In short, the cultural aspect and its implications are fundamental when it comes to the choice of the communication medium between organizations in different cultures. Since the ideal communication medium is culturally determined, therefore the way organizations communicate tend to differ according to the culture where the organization is operating**.** Each communication medium will have a different role in the organization depending on the different culture where the

organization is (Beamer & Varner, 2001). However, that is to be tested and verified throughout the next chapters.

First, the researcher will try to find out which media is preferred in equivocal tasks and which is preferred in simple ones within organizations. In other words, this research will seek to test and verify the assumptions made by MRT that rich media will be employed in equivocal situations and lean media in simple ones. Second, this study will try to validate if Hofstede and Hall's cultural frameworks go hand-in-hand and in positive directions with MRT or not. To make it clearer, the researcher will try to test if high-context collectivistic cultures and low-context individualistic ones alike will have similar media preferences and in accordance with the predictions of MRT or if cultures will differ in their choices.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss and explain Media Richness Theory (MRT), its development, applicability and effects on the media choices made by employees belonging to different cultural backgrounds within organizations. This chapter will give discuss Media Selection Theories, which in turn gave way to the creation of MRT.

To a great extent, we tend to assume that people interpret our messages the same way we intended them, which is not always the case. Misunderstandings occur upon communicating with different people; as most of the time we tend to interpret others' messages using our own frames of reference, while they interpret ours with their own frames of reference (Wiseman, 1995). Accordingly, choosing a good communication medium for the different tasks would partially decrease any potential misunderstanding. However, creating the required appropriate match between the medium and the task necessitates a good understanding of the characteristics of the medium, in addition to the usage pattern of such a medium (Rice, 1987). Many theories were devised to explain the media choices, the selection criteria, and their implications. For the purpose of this thesis and in order to have a comprehensive view as to which theory addresses media choices better, we will explain the Media Selection Theories to bring together all available approaches which will in turn pave the way for explaining and analyzing MRT, which is the theory employed in an attempt to explain the media choices made by employees across different cultures within organizations.

2.2. Media Selection Theories

Several theories were developed attempting to study and explain the media selection criteria made by individuals in organizations. However, results were contradictory and inconclusive at times (Guthrie, 2001). The selection theories are divided into two main groups based on the variables they consist of (Carlson & Davis, 1998). The first group is the 'trait theories of media selection' consisting of two dissimilar approaches that regard "media selection to be a function of traits of the media and characteristics of the task" (Carlson & Davis, 1998, p. 336). The second group, 'Social Interaction Theories', consist of procedures which explain different social factors pertaining to the media usage and clarifies the way media users attribute certain characteristics to the media which consequently affect their medium choice (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

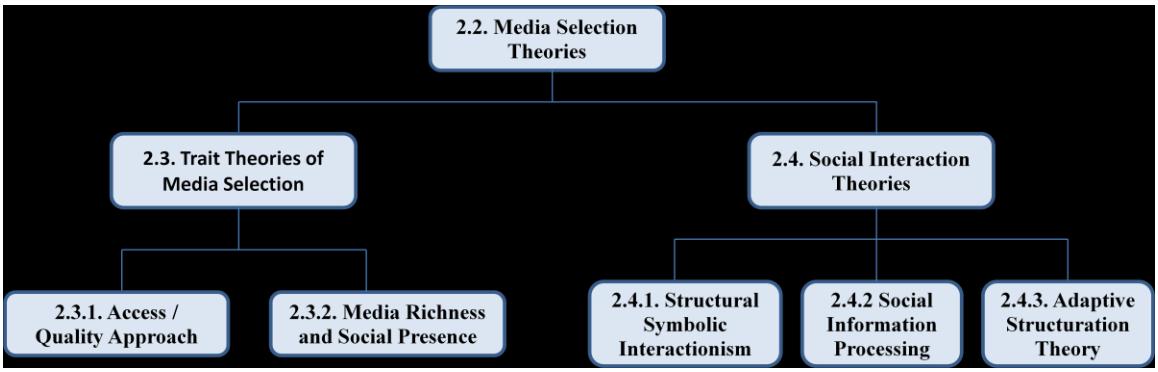


Figure 2.1: Media Selection Theories

(Carlson & Davis, 1998)

2.3. Trait Theories of Media Selection

Trait Theories of Media Selection contain two main theories; 'access and quality' on one hand, and 'media richness' and 'social presence' on another.

2.3.1. Access / Quality Approach

First, Access and quality approach affirms that media selection is a result of a "cost benefit analysis in which users try to attain an acceptable quality of information by exchanging information using media that require the least effort to access" (Carlson & Davis, 1998, p. 336). In other words, according to this approach users are aiming to achieve quality information in return for the minimum effort. Media selection in general has been a matter of great importance since the 1940s where the aim of these initial, preliminary studies and researches was to understand sources of information. Throughout these researches, the results found that besides written sources of communication, face-to-face was one of the communication media which was heavily relied upon by scientists and engineers (Carlson & Davis, 1998). In the 1970s, studies proved that having easily available information sources was more imperative than the information quality which was attained (Allen as cited in Carlson & Davis, 1998). Some scientists focused on analyzing the applications and traits of information, which was perceived to have objective traits as accuracy, suitability, timeliness, and comprehensiveness (Zmund as cited in Carlson & Davis, 1998). Characteristics such as the ease of access, in addition to convenience were established to be necessary to users as well. In this regards, access to the medium is perceived to be a cost, whereas the quality is the result and outcome gathering information (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

2.3.2. Media Richness & Social Presence

Second, social presence and media richness are similar approaches which were developed by two different groups, the first in Great Britain and the other in United States (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

2.3.2.1. Social Presence

In regards to social presence theory, those in Britain classified the various categories of communications pertaining to business meetings; negotiation, information seeking, problem solving, and providing someone with information. Their initial goal was to decide whether teleconferencing can be economically suitable to hold meetings (Carlson & Davis, 1998). This was the researchers starting point where they managed to devise the social presence theory that is explained to be the "extent to which an individual psychologically perceives other people to be physically present when interacting with them" through media (Carlson & Davis, 1998, p. 338). According to this theory, individuals are aware that media vary in regards to the quantity of social presence they provide; hence, they prefer using a communication medium that makes a good match to a particular communication task (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

2.3.2.2. Media Richness Theory Introduction

On the other hand, Media Richness Theory (MRT), which is also known as Information Richness Theory, which is the theory applied and tested in this study, was originally devised and created in order to address the question "Why do organizations process information?" (Daft and Lengel as cited in Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997, p. 147).

The answer to this question was for the sake of reducing equivocality and uncertainty (Robert & Dennis, 2005). The theory has been viewed as a predictive one regarding the media choices made within organizations (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). In her book *Organizational Communication: Approaches and Processes*, Miller (2009) states that MRT was proposed by Daft and Lengel to understand the choices made by members of organizations regarding the media use. Daft and his colleagues' main interest was in how employees in an organization tend to select one communication medium over another for different tasks within the organization (Miller, 2009). Though the theory was initially developed to explain traditional forms of media such as face-to-face communications or telephone calls, it has been broadened to include newer forms of media such as e-mails (Markus, 1994). MRT attempts to give answers to questions such as when in need to remind employees with a meeting, what is the optimum communication medium to be used; e-mail, telephone, face-to-face? Will the medium be any different when firing an employee (Miller, 2009)?

2.3.2.3. Media Ranking Hierarchy according to MRT

MRT is a media selection theory that provides the main frame and structure for ranking the communication media starting with the richest to the leanest. In one of its definitions, MRT is said to be the "ability of information to change understanding within a time interval" (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997, p. 147). MRT was constructed around the hypothesis which confirms that the various communication media contain various degrees of a feature called 'richness', which in turn make them more or less efficient for transferring knowledge and information (Knock, 2005). The concept of media richness is

perceived to be an "invariant, objective property of communication media" (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997, p. 147). In other words, according to the theory, the richness of any medium, as well as its ranking, is unchangeable, regardless of any individual or organizational differences pertaining to the media usage (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). Daft and his colleagues use four distinct criteria by which they define the richness of the medium; (A) availability of immediate feedback, (B) the use of cues; verbal and non-verbal, (C) the use of ordinary language, and (D) the personal aspect of the communication medium (Miller, 2009). These four aspects make up the definition of the richness concept (Timmerman & Madhavapeddi, 2008).

The choice of the medium has a strong influence in regards to the richness of the message, and reversibly, the requirement for richness and message purpose has an effect on the choice of the channel. Because some media are richer than the others, they allow information to be carried more effectively. Face-to-face communication for example is thought to be the richest as it provides a wide range of verbal and nonverbal aspects to communicate any message; where rich channels are seen to be more effective for ambiguous and important information. Numeric data and tables on the other hand are viewed to be the least in richness. Communicating using rich media helps us observe the issue at hand as well as understand how our communication partner is thinking through exchanging ideas and receiving rapid feedback. The verbal and nonverbal aspects add to the richness of any communication (Beamer & Varner, 2001).

Based on what has been discussed above, the hierarchy of media from rich to lean in regards to information richness is; face-to-face, followed by telephone, personal written communication such as letters, official written communication such as bulletins,

and formal number communication such as computer output (Markus, 1994). The weight of media characteristics in assessing the richness of any medium is feedback, representing the highest richness level, followed by the channel, source, language, and target representing the least richness level (Rice, 1992). However, "the effectiveness of a message depends on the specific communication context and the interplay of all the variables including the channel, cultural environment, and position in the firm" (Beamer & Varner, 2001, p. 350). In other words, lean channels can be as effective as rich ones depending on the communication needs and the culture in which media is employed (Beamer & Varner, 2001).

The below table illustrates the richness ranking of each communication medium versus a number of criteria that might be available in that medium. For example, face-to-face is ranked high in richness in regards to the feedback, as it provides instant feedback; provides multiple cues; the communication message is tailored according to the situation and communication partner; and finally, it provides a wide range of emotions.

Table 2.1.: Illustrates the types of communication
(Source: as cited in Newberry, 2001)

Media Rating (across) Criteria(down)	High	Medium	Low
Feedback	Face to Face Video Conferencing Synchronous Audio Text Based Chat		E-mail Threaded Discussion Asynchronous Audio
Multiple cues	Face to Face	Video Conferencing	Synchronous Audio Asynchronous Audio Text Based Chat E-mail Threaded Discussion
Message Tailoring	Face to Face	Video Conferencing Synchronous Audio E-mail	Text Based Chat Asynchronous Audio Threaded Discussion
Emotions	Face to Face	Video Conferencing Synchronous Audio Asynchronous Audio	Text Based Chat E-mail Threaded Discussion

2.3.2.4. Media and their Richness-Carrying Capacity

Media vary in their capabilities in regards to carrying rich information (Carlson & Davis, 1998). Communication channels are said to be 'rich' if they have all or many of mentioned traits, such as face-to-face communication. In other words, communication which can clarify ambiguity and overcome different perspectives in a timely manner using several verbal and non-verbal cues is seen to be rich. Because rich media works on reducing equivocality in any task, it enables communicators to overcome any differences in understanding by supplying the means to process complex information. On the other hand, those channels which have none or few of these mentioned characteristics, such as

flyers, are said to be 'lean' (Miller, 2009). That is, communication that needs time and cannot overcome different frames of references is lean (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). Media that is low in richness "process fewer cues and restrict feedback, and are less appropriate for resolving equivocal issues" (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997, p. 147). That being said, lean media are efficient in processing standard and ambiguity-free messages. In a way, richness is seen to be related to the learning capacity of any communication (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). All other communication channels, such as telephone, voice mail, memos, and e-mails, are neither rich nor lean but somewhere in the middle within this continuum (Miller, 2009).

2.3.2.5. Matching the Medium to the Task

Since any new technology tends to supplement the existing one, instead of replacing it, organizations which use new technologies are marked with increased venues for communication (Miller, 2009). Accordingly, with the vast spread of technology and the simplicity it now involves, there is an excitement about using it, even if the task is not to be accomplished in a suitable manner through these media (Markus, 1994). Researchers examined the connection between the task-at-hand and the use of technology (Hinds, & Kiesler, 1995). On one hand, it was found that technology has promoted less face-to-face interaction, while on the other, though face-to-face is ranked as the highest medium in richness, advanced technologies are still rated higher than traditional media such as telephones (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009). However, the "ease of electronic communication has contributed to ill-conceived messages hastily developed and transmitted" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 286). Therefore, a competent communicator

should make a wise decision as to when to choose an electronic medium for communication versus face-to-face (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009).

In most cases, the most effective outcome is the result of matching the right medium with the correct task. "Too little media richness may result in miscommunication; too much richness is likely to be wasteful" (Markus, 1994, p. 505). The relation between choosing a medium and the task is affected by the communication purpose, the communication direction, and the media characteristics (Rice, 1987). Because mediated communication tends to filter out several cues which are available while communicating face-to-face (Rice, 1992), oral media, such as face-to-face, are considered richer than written one; while synchronous media, which are the media that provide instantaneous feedback like face-to-face and telephones, are considered more rich than asynchronous media, which are these media which have a delay between the origination and completion of the message. E-mail, as an example of asynchronous media that has been ranked low in richness, is viewed to be inappropriate for those tasks with high degree of equivocality (Markus, 1994). As a matter of fact, synchronization is viewed to be a fundamental aspect when handling complex tasks as it allows exchanging information while providing room for continuous feedback to handle misunderstandings and fill required details and gaps (Hinds, & Kiesler, 1995). Thus, asynchronous media eliminates several social cues (Rice, 1992).

2.3.2.6. Reducing Organizational Uncertainty and Equivocality

Within MRT, there is an assumption that organizations try to interpret their environment through information processing (Rice, 1992), where complicated tasks

require more information processing than the effortless and straightforward ones (Daft, & Macintosh, 1982). Accordingly, it is essential as per MRT to create a match between the suitable communication channels; such as face-to-face or written media, and the requirement to process information; such as uncertainty and equivocality reduction (Markus, 1994). According to MRT, the primary concern of communication is to reduce uncertainty and equivocality involved (Rice et al., 1998) allowing organizations to reach common grounds for understanding in ambiguous situations (Carlson & Davis, 1998). 'Uncertainty' is perceived to be the "lack of potentially available knowledge about an analyzable task or procedure" (Rice et al., 1998, p. 4). Uncertainty is reduced by increasing the available information (Rice et al., 1998). Reducing uncertainty in any task is important to successfully accomplish internal tasks, manage the various activities, and understand the external environment (Carlson & Davis, 1998). Since uncertainty is caused by the lack of information, organizations form structured webs such as formal information channels to ease the flow of information between individuals. 'Equivocality' on the other hand is "the lack of shared understanding about some situation that requires learning and sense making" (Rice et al., 1998, p. 4). Seeking out information is not the right way to reduce equivocality, but rather one must understand the situation through communicating and negotiating with others (as cited in Rice et al., 1998). Equivocality is related to "negotiating meanings for ambiguous situations" (Carlson & Davis, 1998, p. 337). In other words, to reduce equivocality, organizations must find ways to increase the speed of information so that meaning can be clearer. To deal with equivocal situations, media processes rich information where media richness is the trait which describes each

medium's capacity in having the ability to provide instant feedback, communication cues, medium personalization, and language variety (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

Generally speaking, within any organization, rich media is used for complex matters (Beamer & Varner, 2001). Employees working on complicated tasks tend to prefer and make better use communicating face-to-face, or using a relatively rich medium such as telephone, in case face-to-face was not available (Hinds, & Kiesler, 1995). For theorists to be able to explain the employees' media choices made upon communicating, they stated that communication within any organization vary depending on the level of ambiguity involved in any task (Miller, 2009). Unequivocal messages can be used to simplify ambiguous matters, while ill-defined messages on the other hand lead to errors within any taken decision (Daft & Macintosh, 1982). According to the classification of rich and lean media, Daft and his colleagues suggested that the concept of media ambiguity where ambiguity is "the existence of conflicting and multiple interpretations of an issue" will go hand in hand with that of media richness (Miller, 2009, p. 242). In other words, when the task has a high degree of ambiguity or equivocality involved, such as trying to resolve conflict between two employees, it will require the use of a medium that is rich, while when a task is low in ambiguity, such as notifying employees of a meeting, the use of a medium low is richness is all what is needed (Miller, 2009). Employees will be more efficient if they successfully use a well-matched medium that suits the ambiguity of the task at hand (Miller, 2009). The below table illustrates the different results obtained upon matching the media to the different tasks.

Table 2.2: Illustrating the effective media selection predictions
(Source: Miller, 2009, p. 243)

	Unambiguous Task	**Ambiguous Task**
Rich Media	***Communication failure.*** Data glut. Rich media used for routine tasks. Excess cues cause confusion and surplus meaning.	***Effective communication.*** Communication success because rich media match ambiguous tasks.
Lean Media	***Effective communication.*** Communication success because media low in richness match routine messages.	***Communication failure.*** Data starvation. Lean media used for ambiguous messages. Too few cues to capture message complexity.

2.3.2.7. Communication across Cultures

Communication provides social context cues affected by organizational and geographic contexts; this consequently influences the communication behavior (Rice, 1992). With the increasing diversity of the workforce, communication should be even more tailored to the different cultural backgrounds of employees who are expected to work effectively with people across the globe from different time zones, belonging to different cultures, and speaking different languages (Shockley-Zalabak, 2009). While working with a diverse workforce, employees should bear in mind the richness of each channel and choose the optimum communication medium. They may see that the telephone is not a suitable channel if different languages are involved in the conversation; a richer channel might be needed in this case. Employees from a high-context collectivistic culture for example, prefer rich communication in order to deal with people

on a more personal level. Middle Eastern countries prefer to communicate face-to-face as there is a wide range of verbal and non-verbal cues available. Teleconferencing, in high-context collectivistic cultures, is seen as less rich than expected as such cultures are accustomed to breaking in on others while speaking (Beamer & Varner, 2001).

2.3.2.8. Theory Critique: Evidence Supporting MRT

The two aforementioned theories; media richness and social presence are similar to a great extent where both theories perceive face-to-face communication to be the highest when it comes to the richness aspect and containing the highest degree of social presence; and written communication on the other hand is the least in richness and containing the least social presence (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

For our purpose here, we will focus on the critique pertaining to MRT. On one hand, there has been substantial empirical supporting evidence in support of the basic doctrine of the theory. Daft and his colleagues found that those managers who successfully selected an appropriate medium for the different tasks were better performers that those who were not media sensitive. Other studies further supported MRT by providing evidence that e-communication media is more task-oriented and is not as suitable as face-to-face interaction for business communication which users preferred. Later studies lent further support to MRT by suggesting that using e-mail and computer conferencing affected group cohesiveness negatively and moreover it argued that e-communication decreased the cues available in any social interaction, making them more impersonal and consequently are avoided for business tasks, and if adopted within organization will lead to a lower quality in outcomes then face-to-face (Knock, 2005).

Moreover, research found that when dealing with an ambiguous task, employees generally prefer rich media. Research stated that rich media was chosen for ambiguous tasks and vice versa. It was also found that the effectiveness of teams within any organization was based upon selecting media which is rich such as face-to-face or conference calls for complex tasks (Miller, 2009). Furthermore, in a study that compared face-to-face, teleconferencing, and electronic chats, it was found that after analyzing the discussions of several chat groups, difficulties were found while coordinating and verifying the chatters' inputs which in turn slowed their progress and increased their mental effort. Consequently, this supported the concept that electronic chats lack certain cues such as verbal communication which MRT advocates for successful communication in equivocal tasks (Graetz et al as cited in Knock, 2005).

2.3.2.9. Theory Critique: Evidence against MRT

On the other hand, some studies did not find enough supporting evidence for the theory in spite of the previously mentioned existing support. Several studies have reached results which contradicted MRT. Studies found little support upon trying to replicate, extend or test MRT. Contradicting outcomes were found which stated that the lack of social presence and social cues were not necessarily bad as users can compensate the lack of richness by changing their communication behavior. Added to that, it was found that managers used e-mail, which is rated as a lean medium by MRT, quite often for complicated tasks. Moreover, studies found that users could have rich communication while interacting via computer-based communications (Knock, 2005).

MRT has further been tested by focusing on individual's behavior in a lab experiment where individuals were entitled to use technology in a way that resembles their use within any organizational setting. However, the results of the tests were not in favor of MRT, lending further evidence against the theory. In another refutation of the theory, a researcher gathered quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to the behavior of managers she was observing at her site. In her findings, she said that the real media usage behavior was incompatible with what the theory has anticipated. She also found that managers used e-mail much more than the predictions made by MRT, and in a way that the theory would regard to be ineffective (Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997).

Other studies have provided evidence which added to the refutation of MRT. Several studies discussed the observed richness in the assumed to be lean media by MRT. Studies provided evidence that e-mail was a rich, not a lean, medium as hypothesized by MRT. Evidence stated that e-mail communication was capable of being rich regardless of containing all aspects to be rated as a lean medium (Markus as cited in Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997). Added to this, there was no support found for MRT's assumption that individuals will prefer voice mail to e-mail in a complex situation which requires information exchange. Reversibly, it was found that individuals preferred e-mail (El-Shinnawy and Markus as cited in Ngwenyama & Lee, 1997).

In addition to the above, there is also some ambiguity as to whether the intention of Daft and his colleagues was to address media choices and actual media use patterns; such as the nature or frequency of media use, or media perceptions and perceived media appropriateness; such as perceiving the correct medium for the correct task (Markus, 1994). However, "in theories of this type, people are believed to act on the basis of their

perceptions, and thus perceptions and behaviors are expected to correspond" (Markus, 1994, p. 504). Accordingly, there seems to be no dispute between the media choices and the perceived media appropriateness as both would overlap creating a single actual media use pattern.

Adding on the aforementioned evidence, MRT was also criticized for its failure to find explanations regarding the task appropriateness and media selection behavior with the availability of new media in organizations (Carlson & Davis, 1998). Scholars dispute whether the theory provides good enough explanation for the use of technology in organizations. There are media choices made that do not make the correct match between the task ambiguity and media richness, which makes it clear that employees within organizations may have other selection criteria or goals when choosing a communication medium aside from the task ambiguity (Miller, 2009). One of these studies proved that e-mail was used for tasks which would need media that is high on the richness level, such as face-to-face. In short, literature found that e-mail is incorrectly placed on the media richness scale (Carlson & Davis, 1998). Furthermore, scholars have questioned the employees' rationality in regards to their media choice behavior, in addition to the degree to which media characteristics are stable and objective (Miller, 2009).

A main explanation for the discrepancy in matching the communication medium to the task is due to the mismatch made while comparing the richest medium, as face-to-face, to all other communication media. MRT is dubbed as 'cues filtered out' because they rate media by the amount of available cues in comparison to face-to-face. Such comparisons are reasonable for traditional media; however, they do not work well for newer media such as e-mail which has new capabilities such as communication storage

and retrieval, memory, access control, and participation in communication. Accordingly, e-mail might be considered as a rich medium from users' point of view. These aspects of new media such as e-mail were not considered when classifying the media according to its richness, which led to a faulty placement for new media on the media richness scale (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

A second explanation is pertaining to the relation between the task and the medium itself. Some evidence shows that participants prefer rich media when carrying a task they rate or perceive to be equivocal. However, other evidence shows that managers sometimes tend to use media high in richness upon performing tasks which are low in equivocality (Carlson & Davis, 1998). This was explained that they can possibly be acting in response to influences as job pressure, which includes unforeseen problems and deadlines, in addition to geographic distribution or individual differences that are associated with situation which are low in equivocality but indicate users' preference of media high in richness (Steinfield and Fulk as cited in Carlson & Davis, 1998).

The final explanation pertains to the wrong matching between the medium and the task-at-hand. This is explainable by the different opinions of communicators regarding the reasonable ways of media usage. The difference in individuals' perceptions of media is explained by the time needed to develop the required experience in using the medium after its adoption. Research showed that using face-to-face to communicate is not higher in their sociability level as compared to computer-based one since respondents found that computer-based communication is more prevailing than face-to-face. Another study found that the medium's richness may not be fully dependent on channel traits, but rather

on users' observations and points of view, experience of the subject, and the communication partners (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

Another unclear aspect about this theory is that MRT does not seem to explain the differences in the individual's choice in an adequate manner. Added to that is that MRT failed to clarify the systematic differences between groups where researchers found group regularities pertaining to the selection of media that they were not able to explain (Donabedian, 2006).

Another blurry aspect about the theory raises the question of whose perceptions does the theory predicts. Yet the theory tends to state it implicitly that, although there might be some distortions and individual differences, people tend to perceive the media's inherent characteristics in a relatively accurate manner. Finally, the theory has been criticized for its failure to consider any situational influences which could affect individuals' behavior or social aspects which form the perception of media (Markus, 1994). Accordingly and based on the evidence found against MRT, the 'social influence model' was proposed.

2.4. Social Interaction Theories

The development of social interaction theories came in response to the hitches in MRT and social presence theories. Theories of Social Interaction hypothesize that the choice of the media is shaped by a range of social factors, which consequently serve as a way to understand the process of media selection. However, the theories have also proposed several variables which are considered constraints to the media selection process without proposing the choice hierarchy. In other words, these set of theories

proposed a set of variables pertaining to the media selection behavior without predicting the selection behavior itself (Carlson & Davis, 1998). A set of 22 variables which are perceived as significant in the selection of media were devised which include job pressure, geographic dispersion, job categories, ease of use, social influences, organizational levels, the cues offered by the media and others (Steinfield and Fulk as cited in Carlson & Davis, 1998).

Many of the theories of Social Interaction are founded on symbolic interactionism which states that organizations are "webs of interaction and the basis of interaction among members is a shared system of meaning" (Carlson & Davis, 1998, p. 340). Three major theories have been developed within the social interaction theories; Structural Symbolic Interactionism, Social Information Processing, and Adaptive Structuration Processing (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

2.4.1 Structural Symbolic Interactionism

First, in regards to the Structural Symbolic Interactionism theory, it stresses on the social context, where the media selection behavior is established by external forces as social factors or situational restraints (Carlson & Davis, 1998). This theory puts into its consideration factors such as the time constraint, distance, and accessibility of communication parties (Trevino et al. as cited in Carlson & Davis, 1998).

2.4.2 Social Information Processing

Second, the social information processing highlights the idea that "meaning is socially constructed" (Pfeffer 1982; Salancik and Pfeffer 1977, 1978; Zalesny and Farace

1986 as cited in Carlson & Davis, 1998, p. 340). According to the theory, the social environment influences attitudes' creation and behaviors. To a great extent, every organizational member plays a role in establishing media evaluation criteria, focusing attention on the outstanding characteristics of the media, and finally, channeling and directing interpretations (Carlson & Davis, 1998).

Janet Fulk along with her colleagues suggested that using technology within an organization, as well as all the communication media, can be fully viewed and elaborated upon by understanding the social environment within the organization. It is argued that any communication between employees, managers, customers, and others affects the use of media. For example, a company might want to introduce the use of video-conferencing instead of regular phone conference. According to MRT, the introduction of video-conferencing will be welcomed if it offers a good match to the task complexity. However, the Social Information Model would suggest that the individual's acceptance or refusal of this new technology might be affected by what a person knows about this medium (Miller, 2009). In other words, employees might have heard a lot about how awkward a person feels when attending a real-time, video and audio conference. Accordingly and because of such social influences, employees may not prefer using video-conferencing, even if it offers a good match to the task complexity.

This model tends to view the use of technology for communicating as a complex function based on (A) the task's characteristics, in addition to the media itself, (B) previous knowledge and experience, (C) individual differences, and (D) social information (Miller 245). This model can be seen as an extension of MRT as it explains the "objective characteristics of task and media (i.e., task ambiguity and media richness)"

(Miller, 2009, p. 245). Evidence has been found in support of this model. It was established that peoples' perceptions of e-mail for example were affected by the opinions of others, as well as with the experience and knowledge of the system itself (Miller, 2009).

2.4.3. Adaptive Structuration Theory

Last, the Adaptive Structuration Theory states that all groups choose certain features of technology to use while interacting, and consequently create an effect of technology on that group (Carlson & Davis, 1998). In other words, technology is seen to be a medium, as well as an outcome of human action (Orlikows as cited in Carlson & Davis, 1998).

In conclusion, in spite of the several aforementioned theories, it is significant to note that aside from the great deal of criticism of MRT, many researchers still continue working with this individual-based choice theory (Markus, 1994). In addition, most of the attempted alterations and additions to the MRT do not "fundamentally alter the theory's character as an individual-level rational choice explanation" (Markus, 1994 p. 505). Accordingly, and for the purpose of this thesis, MRT will be employed and tested where it will be defined as a process by which employees in any organization rationally try to link the "characteristics of the communication media at their disposal to the requirements of their communication tasks in order to achieve personal and organizational effectiveness" (Markus, 1994, p. 505).

CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an overview of some of the significant studies which have been published in the field of organizational communication, and the conclusions reached which resulted in the support of the Media Richness Theory at times, and in its rejection at other times.

The importance of organizational communication and its effectiveness is not a dispensable matter. Nowadays, more and more firms, especially those which are dispersed geographically tend to turn to electronic networks aiming to increase productivity on both levels; personal and organizational. Accordingly, it is fundamental to acknowledge the importance and effectiveness of the media choices made by the employees in regards to the effects they have on the organization (Markus, 1994). "In information richness theory, effectiveness is likely believed to suffer if managers choose media that are not sufficiently 'rich' in information carrying capacity for the tasks they need to accomplish" (Markus, 1994, p. 503).

There seems to be no clear-cut definite answer when it comes to the optimum medium for communication between employees. In light of the MRT, when a task is complex or uncertain, it is better to use richer communication channels. However, there has been continuous debates in regards to how "suitable or effective new media, such as electronic mail and voice mail, are for various communication activities, as compared to traditional media such as face-to-face or telephone" (Rice et al., 1998, p. 4).

3.2. Studies in Support of MRT

Several studies and researches have been conducted and succeeded in finding full or partial support for MRT.

3.2.1. Task-Medium Match

Based upon MRT, employees' performance is dependent on the suitable-matching between the communication medium and the task at hand. In their study, Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987) showed support for MRT. They began by asking 11 managers to specify critical incidents within their jobs. The researchers managed to generate 220 incidents and categorized them into 60 situations. A group consisting of 30 judges were requested to rate the equivocality of every situation on a single-scale ranging from 1–5. The results demonstrated that managers who selected a communication medium that matched the task equivocality demonstrated higher performance than those who made a less-suitable medium choice (Daft et al. as cited in Rice et al., 1998).

3.2.2. Information Quality and Organizational Outcomes

Several researches have focused on the information quality within organizations which is related to the organizational outcomes and employees' performance (Byrne & LeMay, 2006). In a study that supports MRT, Synder and Morris (1984) stated that communication quality, in other words, the effectiveness and communication adequacy, from supervisors within any organization was directly related to the performance within the organization. Accordingly, as per the predictions of MRT, the higher and the better the message quality, the more effective the performance within any organization (Synder

& Morris as cited in Byrne & LeMay, 2006). Several other studies reached the same conclusions which further supported MRT. A study by Clampitt and Downs (1993) found that when the internal communication within any organization is of a high quality, the productivity standards improved. That is when communication is better, the quantity, quality and time efficiency improved (Clampitt & Downs as cited in Byrne & LeMay, 2006).

Research has also found a link between satisfaction with information and the outcomes within organizations (Byrne & LeMay, 2006). Downs and Hazen (1977) proposed that satisfaction with communication is seen and understood as a construct consisting of nine aspects which are strongly related to the job satisfaction (Downs & Hazen as cited in Byrne & LeMay, 2006). Some of these aspects are the communication climate that refers to organizational and personal communication; organizational perspective, which reflects the satisfaction of communication within organizations; and effectiveness of the media and coworkers' communications (Byrne & LeMay, 2006).

In a different study that also touches on the relation between the suitable media selection and employees' performance, Daft, Lengel, and Trevino (1987) conducted a study to test the managers' medium choice, where they found support for the basic tenets of MRT. The first hypothesis stated that in regards to the processing information by managers, there will be a direct relation between the equivocality involved in the message and media richness. The second one stated that managers will prefer oral media for equivocal tasks and written one for less equivocal ones. The last hypothesis stated that managers who are rated as high performers are those who are attentive to the relation

between the equivocality involved in the task and the media richness (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987).

To test these hypotheses, interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of managers who were asked about their areas of responsibility and performance. In addition, managers were requested to describe incidents which they used different communication media, which after eliminating the duplicate answers, 60 incidents were concluded. Consequently, managers were asked about the medium they would choose for the 60 incidents (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987).

The results showed that in regards to the first hypothesis, there was a direct, positive relation between media richness and message equivocality. For tasks low in equivocality, less than 15% of the respondents preferred face-to-face communication, whereas more than 60% preferred written media. Accordingly, the first hypothesis was supported as rich media was preferred for complicated tasks. For the second hypothesis, a low percentage of the respondents preferred oral communication for tasks low in equivocality. Such findings provide support that when understanding is achievable, written media is preferred. The findings also suggested that managers select media depending on the nature of communication. Finally, the third hypothesis was supported as it was found that selecting the correct communication medium is related to the communication effectiveness, and accordingly to the manager's performance (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987).

In short, this study found that written or electronic media cannot replace face-to-face, because though face-to-face communication is a weak medium for tasks like data processing, yet it is a significant one for transferring multiple cues and providing instant

feedback for equivocal situations. In other words, "media low in richness is appropriate for the efficient communication of objective data to support routine decisions" (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987, p. 364), while rich media are for subjective matters that involve conflicting aspects (Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987).

In another study that further supports MRT, Byrne and LeMay (2006), surveyed 598 employees from an organization in the US to measure their satisfaction with (a) received information regarding their job, the company they work for and the business unit, (b) satisfaction with the several media, (c) the quality of information received from supervisors and managers, and (d) confidence in the management. Results showed that employees within any organization derive a huge amount of their satisfaction regarding information related to their jobs from rich media as face-to-face communication with their managers or phone dialogues. Lean communications contributed only a little bit to the employees' satisfaction when it comes to information about their jobs. Results were similar when it came to the employees' satisfaction about their business units, and in regards to information satisfaction which is positively related to the employees themselves, rich communication was important. As for the information quality from supervisors, employees preferred rich media most. Employees rated the information quality to be higher when it was delivered through a rich medium (Byrne & LeMay, 2006).

However, when it came to information about the company, employees preferred lean media to rich ones. As per MRT, such a result may be because information about the company does not affect employees in a direct manner. Because learning about the

company did not involve making a critical decision from the employees' side, thus, they did not need additional data using visual cues (Byrne & LeMay, 2006).

Byrne and LeMay explained their findings by referring to the employees expectations for communication within the company. They stated that employees may expect to receive messages from their supervisors via formal written memos. They also assumed that many geographically dispersed organizations use lean as well as rich media for communicating, whereas rich media is used for information which is useful locally. They suggested that when employees were satisfied with lean media, it was based on their confidence in their management rather than rich media. Finally, the study found that the "perceptions of satisfaction in information may be related to the technology used to transmit the information, and not on the content of the message alone or on the qualities of the sender" (Byrne & LeMay, 2006).

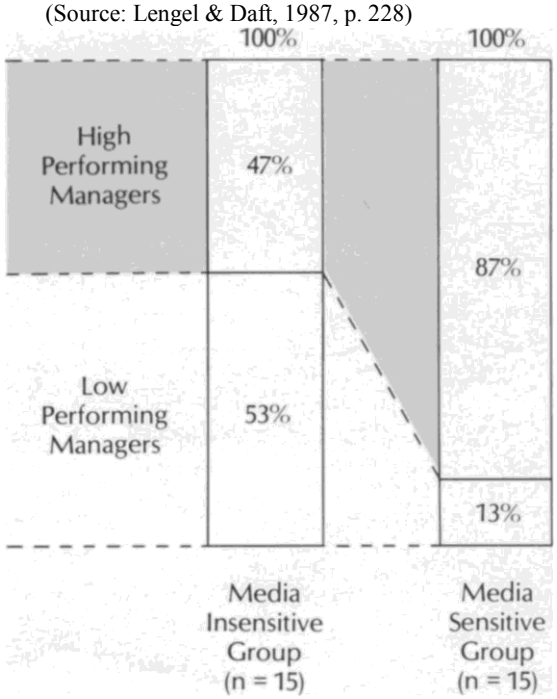
In another study conducted by Lengel and Daft (1987), it was found that choosing the right communication medium directly affected the managers' performance. The study tested and mapped the effect of the media selection sensitivity of 95 executives working for a petrochemical company to their job performance. A number of 15 managers were tagged as 'media sensitive' as they showed a consistent matching of the medium to the message or task. On the other hand, 15 other managers were tagged as 'media insensitive' after showing an inconsistent matching of the medium to the message or task (Lengel & Daft, 1987).

The study observed the performance of the 30 managers while maintaining a performance evaluation system that rated managers' performance from high to low. The study found a strong relationship between the richness sensitivity and the managers'

performance. In other words, 87% of the managers who were media sensitive were rated as high-performers, whereas only 47% of those who were media insensitive were rated as high-performers. The below figure illustrates the percentage of media sensitive managers who are rated as high performers versus those versus the media insensitive managers who are rated as low performers (Lengel & Daft, 1987).

Figure 3.1.: Media Sensitivity and Managers' Performance

(Source: Lengel & Daft, 1987, p. 228)



According to the study, managers who are media insensitive often used the media in contrary of the media richness assumptions. For example, those managers who are media insensitive selected a written memo while handling a difficult task such as notifying someone that he should accept a demotion whereas they communicated face-to-face in routine tasks. Managers who were media sensitive on the other hand made the appropriate match between the medium and task-at-hand. The study supported MRT by concluding that for communication to be effective there has to be an appropriate selection

of the medium which can engage the sender and receiver to mutually understand the task-at-hand (Lengel & Daft, 1987).

Based upon this study, a set of rules were devised to help executives sharpen their media selection criteria. The first two rules, which are relevant to this study, will be discussed accordingly. The first stated that in order to handle a complicated and non-routine task or message, a rich medium is preferred, more preferably face-to-face. Rich medium is preferred as it allows direct and unfiltered communications, while conveying emotions through gestures and facial expressions. If a lean medium was used while handling such a complicated task, a wide range of the emotional cues will be lost. The second rule stated that with simple and routine tasks or messages, a lean medium is preferred. The reason given for using lean media is that they are impersonal and logical, therefore are consequently used to convey statistical data, or official requests. Such lean media are well-suited for simple tasks which are precise. In other words, a memo would be efficient while handling an unambiguous task which does not require the surplus cues associated with face-to-face communications (Lengel & Daft, 1987).

3.2.3. Testing MRT across different Cultures

In a different research conducted by Rice, D'Ambra, & More (1998), a relation was found between media richness, equivocality, and media preference. However, the researchers did not find many cultural differences in the media preferences between cultures. In their research, a number of 44 managers from Australia, US; representing individualistic countries, and Hong Kong, and Singapore representing collectivistic ones were divided into focus groups which discussed (a) significant situations within the job,

(b) the components of communication in those significant situations, and (c) all possible media used in such critical situations. The result was 192 different communication cases which were classified into 11 different kinds of critical situations using 10 different media. The equivocality of every situation was rated on a 1-5 scale (Rice et al., 1998).

The study found that in regards to equivocality of situation, the three most equivocal situations were (a) arranging political support for the department, (b) conversing with the manager about a certain problem, and (c) updating a manager regarding the advancement of a project. In regards to media richness, face-to-face communication was ranked as the richest medium, followed by telephone, voicemail, E-mail, and business memos. As for the preference of each of the media across the 11 different situations, face-to-face was ranked on top, followed by e-mail, telephone, business memos, and finally voicemail. Moreover, it was found that those who had the know-how of a certain new communication medium were expected to prefer it for the different situations more than those people who do not have experience with it. Last, when it came to measuring the media preference for each individual situation, it was found that, as per MRT, when situations were less equivocal, face-to-face communications decreased while business memos, e-mail, and voice mail increased (Rice et al., 1998). Accordingly, the study found that as per the assumptions made by the theory, face-to-face was ranked as the richest medium in general and the most suitable one upon encountering complicated situations.

In regards to the cultural aspect, the results showed that there were no worth mentioning differences between individualistic and collectivistic countries; except that those from individualistic countries considered that discussing a problem with their

supervisor was less equivocal. Individualistic countries rated memos as less rich whereas they saw telephones to be richer. They preferred memos and face-to-face communication less than collectivistic ones. Yet, there was no significant difference when it came to two of the new media; e-mail and voice-mail. Finally, it was inferred that individualistic countries were a bit less expected to prefer telephone communication for tasks low in equivocality (Rice et al., 1998).

Generally speaking, according to this study, "media richness theory does not do so well at the individual level…because of considerable individual dispositions, situational and symbolic constraints, and localized social influence" (Rice et al., 1998, p. 20). The results show that evidence is sometimes weak or contradictory particularly in regards to new media. This study also found that in regards to cultural values, there were some difference pertaining to the media perceptions, however, it was neither strong nor consistent (Rice et al., 1998).

Added to the above researches, Lee Y. and Lee Z. conducted a study which seems to provide only partial support for MRT. The researchers conducted their study by applying MRT and Social Influence Theory in several countries aiming to test whether or not communication between employees and supervisors hold across several cultures. A cross-cultural study using questionnaires was conducted with the assistance of 120 employees in telecommunication industry from the US and South Korea. For our purpose here, we will focus on the first hypothesis which stated that Korean employees will have higher preference for rich media, even for unequivocal tasks, more than the US employees (Z. Lee & Y. Lee, 2009).

To test this hypothesis, employees were asked about the medium they would use for communication in three highly equivocal tasks and three low equivocal ones. Table 3.1 indicates the percentage of individuals who used e-mail for each of the six different scenarios (Z. Lee & Y. Lee, 2009).

Table 3.1.: Percentage of employees choosing e-mail (upward communication)

(Source: Lee Z. & Lee Y., 2009, p. 68)

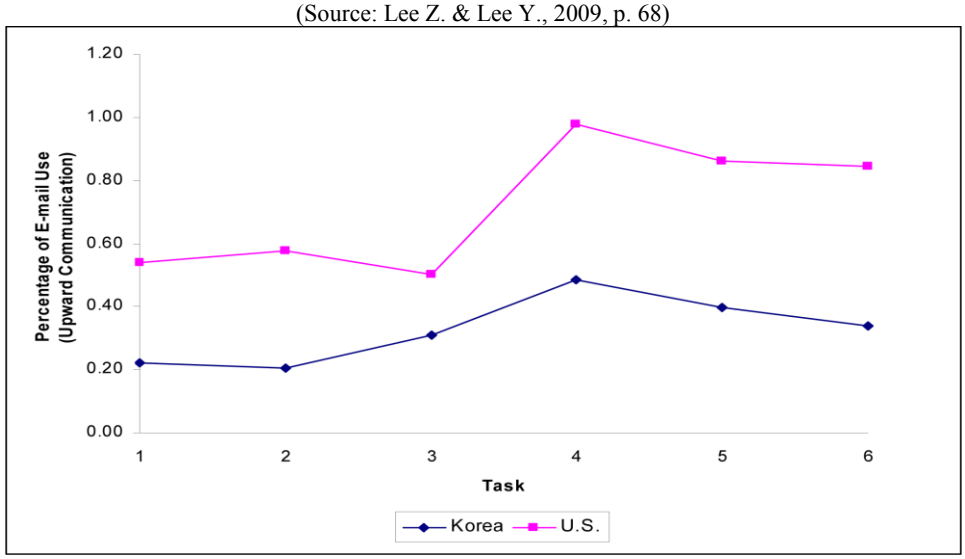
	Scenario: Your office is on the first floor and your supervisor (or colleague) is on the second floor of the same building.	Percent of respondents choosing email			
		Supervisor		Colleague	
		Korea	US	Korea	US
High Equivocation	1. You have received a request from your supervisor (or colleague) asking about the progress of the project you are working on now.	22.1	53.8	52.9	65.4
	2. You have received an email from your supervisor (or colleague) asking your ideas and plan for a new project you will work on.	20.6	57.7	45.6	55.8
	3. You have just come from a meeting with your supervisor (or colleague) and a computer vendor. You have received an email from your supervisor asking about the desirability of using that vendor.	30.9	50.0	50.0	62.7
Low Equivocation	4. You have received an email from your supervisor (or colleague) asking for a list of names and phone numbers of your major customers.	48.5	98.0	88.2	100.0
	5. You have received an email from your supervisor (or colleague) asking about last year's total sales.	39.7	86.0	77.9	96.2
	6. You have just come from a meeting with your supervisor (or colleague) and a computer vendor. You have received an email from your supervisor) asking the name of the computer vendor.	33.8	84.6	68.7	92.3

Subjects had to choose between email, telephone, face-to-face, and indirect face-to-face (such as courier). For the Korean employees, those who used emails for tasks which are high in equivocality ranged between 22% - 31%, while 33% – 49% used it for tasks low in equivocality. In addition, results showed that for tasks low in equivocality, Korean employees preferred face-to-face or telephone communication. Accordingly, these results suggest that variation in the task equivocality affected the medium choice. Conversely, it was found that most Koreans still had a higher preference for rich media for equivocal and unequivocal tasks; however, they changed the medium they were using depending on the person they were communicating with. In the US on the other hand, the percentage was much higher; more than 50% used email for equivocal tasks, and between

80% - 98% for tasks low in equivocality. Accordingly, task equivocality was a more important factor for US employees (Z. Lee & Y. Lee, 2009).

Figure 3.2.: Percentage of E-mail use (upward communication)

(Source: Lee Z. & Lee Y., 2009, p. 68)



In short, it was found that country, task equivocality, communication direction were determinant factors in choosing the communication medium. The results suggest that as per the predictions of MRT, employees chose the communication medium depending on the task equivocality and communication direction. However, the result of this study does not seem to provide full support for MRT as it was obvious in the case of the Korean employees who tended to prefer rich media for both equivocal and unequivocal tasks; this does not mesh well with the predictions theory. Yet, the results showed that employees from different countries had different usage patterns for media (Z. Lee & Y. Lee, 2009). In other words, the study found that the "applicability of MRT was culturally bound" (Z. Lee & Y. Lee, 2009, p. 69).

3.2.4. The effect of Equivocality and Distance on Media Selection

In another study which further supports MRT, the confidence level in the communication partner and the channel richness were tested. The study proposed that the trust level towards the partner while communicating affects the medium choice. For this study, "trust" is defined as having constructive and encouraging expectations in regards to the reliability and competence of the second person (Blomqvist as cited in Lo & Lie, 2008). Accordingly, when there is a high level of trust in the communication partner, the tolerance level of potential risk tends to be higher and consequently, the communicator will possibly select a less rich channel. Reversibly, with high levels of distrust, the tolerance level is not as high and the communicator will prefer a richer communication medium (Lo & Lie, 2008).

The study proposed several hypotheses. The first stated that in long-distance communication when the task contains high degrees of equivocality, the communicator will prefer a communication medium with high degrees of richness. The second hypothesis stated that in short-distance communication, the degree of equivocality will not influence the richness preference when choosing a communication medium. The third hypothesis stated that in long distance and when there is a high degree of trust in the communication partner, a medium with lower degree of richness will be employed. Finally, the fourth hypothesis stated that in short-distance communication, trust in the communication partner will not have an effect of the richness preference in regards to the communication tools (Lo & Lie, 2008).

To test the mentioned hypotheses, the design for the research was a 2 x 2 experimental design which consisted of: task equivocality and personal trust administered to 198 participants and with two stages for each of the two variables; high and low. To test the implications of the various degrees of physical distance between the partners involved in the communication process on the relations between variables, the experiment included two scenarios; the first pertaining to short-distance and the other to long-distance communication. Consequently, participants were requested to examine the different scenarios and choose a communication medium to communicate with the other partner (Lo & Lie, 2008).

The results show that the amount of equivocality involved in any task is directly and positively related to the amount of richness chosen. In other words, when a task is high in equivocality, communication media with high levels of richness are selected. Accordingly, the first hypothesis was supported. Furthermore, the results proved that the amount of trust in the communication partner is inversely related to the media richness choice. Put differently, when communicating with someone who is highly trusted, communication media which are low in richness are selected. Accordingly, the third hypothesis was supported (Lo & Lie, 2008).

In regards to the second hypothesis, the results found a weak effect for the amount of equivocality upon choosing a medium. Accordingly, when two individuals are close in distance, a rich medium is not necessarily selected for equivocal tasks and vice. Therefore, the second hypothesis was supported. Finally, the fourth hypothesis was also supported when it was found that the amount of trust found between individuals involved in a communication process does not strongly affect the media choice. Overall, this study

found that in long-distance communication, the equivocality involved in any task, as well as the level of trust affects the selection of media, whereas for short-distance communication, neither the equivocality of the task nor trust affected the media choice (Lo & Lie, 2008).

In a different study, the influence of the choice factors on five different media namely face-to-face communication, telephone calls, letters, memos, and e-mail messages was examined. Several hypotheses were developed in this study; for our purpose here, we will focus on the first two. The first hypothesis stated that message equivocality will affect all media choices and that there will be a positive direct relation for face-to-face and telephone conversations and a negative inverse one for all other media. The second hypothesis stated that the distance between communication partners will be associated with media choices in a positive direction for telephone conversations, memos, letters, and e-mails, and in a negative direction for face-to-face (Webster & Trevino, 1995).

In addition to conducting a survey to test media choices, this study has also used policy capturing, which is a within-subject method. Policy capturing helps determine the significance of several factors to employees' choices. In addition, it infers the worthiness of factors from the individuals' choices (Zedeck as cited in Webster & Trevino, 1995).

In regards to the questionnaire, 238 individuals from a public American university were ready to be a part in this study and had access to e-mail at work. Questionnaires were completed by 197 employees. Employees were asked to assume a case where they had been assigned to a university committee regarding the university's future. Different scenarios were devised totaling up to 120 scenarios per respondent. Three different

subsamples were constructed each containing 40 scenarios which led to three different versions of the questionnaire. Each respondent had to rate the possibility of choosing one of the following media: telephone, memo, letter, face-to-face, and e-mail to communicate a certain message. In regards to the policy-capturing measures, five within-subject factors or the independent variables used were: equivocality, symbolic cues, number of message receipts, locations of message receipts, and e-mail use (Webster & Trevino, 1995).

Results found that the media choices made were rational. In other words, message equivocality, for example, was the most important influence that urged employees to choose face-to-face as a communication medium. Message equivocality was also the only factor influencing the choice of every communication medium. In addition, it was found that all factors, except for the location of the message receipt, affected the choice of the telephone. All factors also influenced the choice of memos, letters, and e-mail as media choices. Results further found that MRT is most applicable at the level of a certain given communication task rather than of the job as a whole (Webster & Trevino, 1995).

Consequently, the first hypothesis for this study was supported as it was found that message equivocality significantly influences all media choices. This finding was supported for all communication media except for memos. The second hypothesis was also supported as the study found that the distance between communication partners significantly affects the media choice. Overall, this study found that some factors seemed to be more important for certain media than others such as message equivocality which was an important factor for face-to-face communications (Webster & Trevino, 1995).

3.3. Studies Lacking Support for MRT

On the contrary to the above mentioned researches which showed full or partial support of MRT, there are others which concluded that MRT is not supported.

3.3.1. Preference of E-mail to Voice Mail in Equivocal Tasks

In this study that rejects the predictions of MRT, a number of 35 employees were asked to complete a questionnaire, as well as sit for interviews. The researchers tested the predictions made by MRT in regards to the media choices in equivocal situations by asking employees to choose the preferred medium in situations of different degrees of equivocality. For our purpose here, we will focus on the first hypothesis which stated that individuals will prefer voice mail, which is an oral medium, to electronic mail, which is a written one, in equivocal situations. This hypothesis was not supported. According to the study, employees preferred e-mail to voice mail. Based upon the interviews conducted with the employees, it was found that voice mail was not preferred for complicated situations, but rather for short, one-way direction for information (El-Shinnawy & Markus, 1998).

The results derived from this study do not support the assumptions made by MRT that voice mail, which is a rich medium, would be preferred to e-mail, which is a lean one. Unlike what MRT predicted, e-mail was the medium of choice by employees for both equivocal and unequivocal situations. It was found that richness is not the only determinant factor when it came to the employees' media choices, but rather, there are factors such as message preparation and retrieval which affect their choices. In addition,

factors such as social norms do have an influence on the media choice (El-Shinnawy & Markus, 1998). Accordingly, the study concluded that "rich, oral media do not necessarily handle ambiguity better than lean, written media" (El-Shinnawy & Markus, 1998, p. 250).

3.3.2. Media Selection in Mindful / Mindless Tasks

In another study that showed the lack of support for MRT, Timmerman (2002) worked on this research through differentiating between the media use accomplished in a mindful (i.e. consideration of one's choices) or mindless (over learned) processes. For our purpose here, we will discuss the first hypothesis which predicted that after performing a straightforward task repeatedly, participants who are mindful of using the media will eventually select a lean medium than those who are mindless. To test this, a number of 75 employees from several organizations participated in this part of study by being instructed to complete four questionnaires which were formulated as a communication task requiring the use of a communication medium over and over again, and then instructed to submit them using an appropriate medium (Timmerman, 2002).

The purpose of this study was to test the communication practices within organizations in order to validate MRT's proposition which was done through focusing upon the medium used by the employees to submit the four questionnaires. The media used were email, voice mail, and the World Wide Web (WWW), which is considered the leanest medium. The results found that out of the 75 employees, about 30% sent the fourth questionnaire using email, 32% using voice mail, and 37% using the WWW. Although employees were asked to select a medium that is suitable to a task which is

considered low in equivocality, the use of WWW was not much higher than the use of email or voicemail (Timmerman, 2002). Accordingly, the prediction of MRT that there should be a match between the task at hand and the communication medium was not supported in this study. In other words, participants did not use the leanest medium, WWW in this case, to perform a simple task.

3.3.3. MRT and Decision Making

In a different study, which did not find full support for MRT, Dennis and Kinney (1998) studied the implications of MRT on decision-making using new media namely computer-based and video communications. This study formulated several hypotheses; the most important stated that performance improves as the variety of cues increases. The second stated that performance improves for tasks that are higher in equivocality than ones which are low in equivocality due to the increase of the immediacy of feedback. To test these hypotheses, 132 students participated and were arbitrarily assigned into a two-person group. Participants were allocated into one of the four conditions; video-immediate feedback, video-delayed feedback, computer mediated communication-immediate feedback, and computer mediated communication-delayed feedback and were asked to perform a highly equivocal task and another one lower in equivocality using that medium (Dennis & Kinney, 1998).

Results of this study found that the higher the number available cues as well as the availability of immediate feedback would lead to enhanced performance. Accordingly, the first hypothesis was supported. However, the study did not find support that the availability of multiple cues and feedback would be more imperative for tasks

which are more equivocal. The explanation for such findings is that although participants in this study recognized dissimilarity in media richness as per the assumptions of MRT, the use of rich media in equivocal tasks did not lead to better performances. Accordingly, the results of this study found no support for the basic tenets of MRT that performance improves upon matching the communication media to the task-at-hand. In conclusion, though this study found that subjects noticed differences in richness pertaining to each communication medium, yet the medium itself did not have an effect in regards to the decision quality or communication satisfactions. The only effect found was that using richer communication media led to more rapid decisions, regardless of the task equivocality (Dennis & Kinney, 1998).

3.3.4. Testing E-mail Preference in accordance with MRT

In another study, which did not wholly support MRT, Sullivan tested the e-mail preference in communication tasks within organizations. The main focus of this study was on e-mail within a public organization. The study assumed that preferring one communication channel or another will be altered depending on the communication type and it proposed a hypothesis which stated that users' e-mail preference will be influenced by the communication action when compared to their preference of other communication channels. A survey was distributed on 250 members of the organization where 135 surveys were completed and returned. The survey included males, females and the key levels of the organization's hierarchy. Participants were requested to identify their use of e-mail for several different communication tasks some of which were; making decisions, expressing opinions, responding to questions, personal messages, asking for information,

and sending memos. For the purpose of this study, e-mail was defined as the amount of time that a person spends using e-mail on an average day. Consequently, respondents anticipated their e-mail usage time, which was later converted into minutes for the sake of analysis. The communication activities mentioned were later employed as a group of communication conditions where it was requested from participants to assess their e-mail usage versus the other communication media for every mentioned condition. The communication channels used for comparison were face-to-face, telephone, memoranda, and letters where participants were requested to rank their e-mails usage to be 'better than', 'equal to', or 'not as good as' those other channels (Sullivan, 1995).

The results showed that the utilization and preference for e-mail varied with the variation of the communication activities. The position a person holds and the type of job entailed different e-mail usages, in other words, a secretary was found to use e-mail twice more than analysts do, whereas directors used it for making decisions, as well as handing chores to others. Additionally, the study found e-mail to be utilized more for those tasks which were low in their social presence such as the regular exchange of information than for tasks which were high in their social presence like taking decisions (Sullivan, 1995).

In regards to the richness feature, even though MRT stated that richer channels as face-to-face are preferable to lean ones such as e-mail, this study failed to find full support for this assumption. E-mail was preferred over telephone as much as face-to-face was favored to e-mail. Consequently, this result indicates that either e-mail is a richer medium, unlike what other studies reported, or e-mail preference is related to other characteristics pertaining to the job tasks and requirements. E-mail was established to be ranked between face-to-face and telephone. When e-mail was compared with face-to-

face, it was noticed that e-mail was of lower preference, where it was only preferred for circulating memoranda and delivering documents. The below table shows the average channel preferences across all communication activities where the five communication channels are rated in regards to their average preference (Sullivan, 1995).

Table 3.2.: Average Channel Preferences Across All Communication Activities

(Source: Sullivan, 1995, p. 57)

Communication Channel	Mean
Face-to-Face	2.20
E-mail	2.00
Telephone	1.81
Memos	1.60
Letters	1.57

On the other hand, the study stated that although upon comparing a rich medium to a lean one, the richer will be preferred; this clear-cut distinction between rich and lean media was not that obvious when e-mail was compared to telephone. When comparing e-mail with telephone, there was no clear direct preference. E-mail was more favored than telephone in more than half the activities tested. Added to that, this study found that the rate of preference of e-mail usage for all activities increased signifying that channel preference will vary according to the channel and the communication task. That being said, e-mail preference was found to vary depending on the nature of the communication task, in addition to the characteristics of the other channels available in comparison with it. Thus, the research hypothesis was supported as preference for e-mail varied with the variation of the communication activity undertaken (Sullivan, 1995).

3.3.5. Testing Individuals' Sensitivities in Media Usage

In a different study by Markus, MRT proved its failure to explain communication processed. In this study, an instrument was used to evaluate and explain the individuals' sensitivities pertaining to the usage of media by assuming hypothetical tasks. Upon comparing the results to those predicted by MRT, the researcher found that to communicate something equivocal to someone who is far, a very small percent of the respondents, about 42% only, preferred telephone, which is the medium that MRT predicted its use in such situations (Markus as cited in Robert & Dennis, 2005). Accordingly, the results of this study were contradictory to those assumptions made by MRT.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1. The Purpose and Significance of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine the assumptions made by Media Richness Theory that richer communication is more suitable for equivocal tasks within any organization. This study will focus on the media choices made by employees in accordance with the MRT. The study will further seek to evaluate whether or not the predictions made by MRT hold across different cultures; high-context collectivistic versus low-context individualistic. In short, the main objective of this study is to verify whether MRT is valid in regards to its assumptions that using richer media makes a difference upon encountering a complicated task, added to that, whether the assumptions made vary from one culture or another or not.

This study is significant as it is one among the first studies which compares and examines the implications of MRT across several different countries and cultures; Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan and United Arab Emirates representing high-context collectivistic cultures, and USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Czech Republic and Germany representing low-context individualistic cultures.

Finally, since this study is a preliminary one assessing the relevancy of the media choices made in regards to the task-at-hand, as well as the media preferences of the different cultures, a couple of hypotheses were formulated and tested. The hypotheses are intended to test the validity and applicability of the theory, as well as assess the differences between cultures in making media choices within organizations. The results of this study will allow researchers and academics to investigate further in regards to the validity, effects, and

implications of MRT and gain more insight into the theory and its applicability across different cultures for future researches.

4.2. Research Problem

First, the researcher will try to find out which media is preferred in equivocal tasks and which is preferred in simple ones within organizations. In other words, this research will seek to test and verify the assumptions made by MRT that rich media will be employed in equivocal situations and lean media in simple ones. Second, this study will try to validate if Hofstede and Hall's cultural frameworks go hand-in-hand and in positive directions with MRT or not. To make it clearer, the researcher will try to test if high-context collectivistic cultures and low-context individualistic ones alike will have similar media preferences and in accordance with the predictions of MRT or if cultures will differ in their choices.

4.3. Research Questions

1- What are the most important factors which influence employees within any organization upon choosing a communication medium?

2- As per the predictions made by MRT, can too little media richness or mismatching the medium to the task-at-hand lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding within organizations?

3- Is there a difference, as per MRT's predictions, in the media choices made when handling complicated tasks than when handling simple ones?

4- Do employees believe that organizational effectiveness can be reached upon making a suitable match between the task and the communication medium?

4.4. Hypotheses

H1: Employees prefer rich media such as face-to-face communications, telephone calls or voice mails to lean media as e-mails or memos in highly equivocal situations.

H2: High-context collectivistic cultures will prefer richer media in all communication tasks within their organizations more than low-context individualistic cultures.

4.5. Methodology

This study used quantitative research methodology. Since this study involves a cross-cultural comparison, the most suitable research method to be used to assess the implications and applicability of MRT across different cultures was an Internet-based survey. The Internet survey has been conducted using Survey Monkey, which is an online survey software tool. Survey Monkey was used to gather information in regards to the usage patterns and preferences of the different communication media within organizations and the variations of the theory's applicability across different cultures.

4.6. Sample

The sample used for this study was a non-random, purposive / quota sample. The reason for selecting a quota sample is that it is the most suitable type of sampling since this study is based on breaking the sample down according to the cultures that respondents belonged to. So using the quota sampling technique ensured the representation of the high-context collectivistic (HCC) and the low-context individualistic (LCI) one in the sample. Accordingly, and for our purpose here, the online

surveys were distributed in HCC cultures represented in Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Tunisia, Bahrain and LCI ones represented in the Canada, USA, UK, Germany, France, Czech Republic, and Switzerland. A total number of 312 survey results were completed by respondents working for IT / Telecommunication companies; where 169 respondents were from HCC and 143 were from LCI ones.

Because this survey is based on a cross-cultural comparison between HCC cultures and LCI ones, a filter was created for the survey aiming to separate respondents by the culture where they belong accordingly. Consequently, the results, statistics and graphs represent and compare each of the cultures.

4.7. Operational Definitions

Since this study is based upon MRT, it is worth noting the operational definitions for the below:

- *Rich Media:* is the media which has (A) instant feedback, (B) multiple cues; verbal and non-verbal, (C) natural language, and (D) personal aspect of the medium (Miller, 2009). Accordingly, this includes face-to-face communication, as the richest form, followed by telephone, and video conferencing.
- *Lean Media:* are the forms of media which have none or few of the above mentioned characteristics. Flyers are considered the leanest communication medium. Other media such as voice mail, memos, and e-mails, are somewhere in the middle within this continuum (Miller, 2009).

- *Simple / Routine Tasks:* are those tasks which are easy to handle and understand and do not require visual cues. An example of a simple task is providing someone with a customer's contact details.
- *Complicated / None Routine Tasks:* are those tasks which are not easy to handle or understand and are better understood with the aid visual cues. An example of a complicated task is explaining the progress of a project to your manager.
- *Visual Cues:* are defined as the immediate feedback, gestures, and body language.
- *Uncertainty / Equivocality:* are defined as the lack of information and shared understanding within the members of any organization.
- *Equivocal Situations:* are those situations which require a person to understand the situation through communicating and negotiating with others (Daft & Weick as cited in Rice et al., 1998). They are the situations which require the use of rich media to make meaning clearer.

Other operational definitions which are useful throughout this research are pertaining to cultures and their frameworks. As mentioned above, this study aims to assess the media choices made by employees in high-context collectivistic cultures as opposed to the choices made by those in low-context individualistic cultures. The study is based on the two cultural frameworks which will be defined below. The first framework applied in this study was created by Edward T. Hall where he divided cultures into:

- *Low-context:* identified as being direct in the verbal interactions, overt in expression, go straight to the point, and sender-oriented (as cited in Samovar, & Porter, 1994)

- *High-context:* identified as being indirect in the verbal interactions, contains subtle nonverbal nuances, and interpreter-sensitive (as cited in Samovar, & Porter, 1994).

The second cultural framework is that by Hofstede. According to him, there are four different cultural values. For our purpose here, we will define the below:

- *Individualism:* is related to those societies that have loose ties between individuals and everyone is expected to take care of themselves and their immediate families (as cited in Rice et al., 1998).
- *Collectivism:* is related to those individuals in societies who are part of strong groups that stay connected to one another throughout their lifetimes (as cited in Rice et al., 1998). Unlike the individualistic cultures which focus on the 'I', collectivistic ones focus on the 'we' versus the 'I' (Samovar, & Porter, 1994).

4.8. Independent and Dependent Variables

For this study, the independent variables are task equivocality, task uncertainty, and cultures; high-context collectivistic cultures and low-context individualistic cultures. The dependent variables on the other hand include the employees' media choice, the employees' selection criteria, and the employees' perceptions of organizational effectiveness.

4.9. Questionnaire Design

The survey was created and distributed online to employees in IT / Telecommunication companies via e-mail in several companies. The link to the survey

was also posted to IT / Telecommunication professional groups in websites; namely Facebook and Linkedin.

The survey consisted of three major sections totaling up to 24 questions where all questions were closed-ended. The first section consisted of general warm-up questions which asked the participants about their age and gender. Another question in this section asked respondents about their country of residence, whereas this question is a pivotal one in this study as it segments participants in order to be able to compare cultures. All three questions in this section were based on nominal level of measurement.

The second section tested the employees preferred media within their organizations. Respondents were asked to respond to 11 questions where most of them were measured on interval level of measurement and structured through Likert measurement scale. This section asked employees about their preferred medium while communicating with their colleagues and managers, the criteria upon which employees choose a certain medium while communicating within their organization and the significance of matching the communication medium to the task-at-hand, the importance of various variables such as visual cues and the nature of the task-at-hand while choosing a communication medium, and finally it asked about the suitability of rich media to complicated task and lean media to simple ones.

The last section tested employees' media choices in regards to their cultural background. Respondents were asked to respond to 10 questions where most of them were measured on interval level of measurement and structured through a Likert measurement scale. This section asked employees about their media preference in simple and complicated tasks. Respondents were also asked to choose their preferred

communication medium in light of their cultural background. In this section, six different communication situations were adapted from a study by El-Shinnawy and Markus (1998), titled 'Acceptance of Communication Media in Organizations: Richness or Features', another by Lee Z., and Lee Y (2009), titled 'Emailing the Boss: Cultural Implications of Media Choice' and finally from Miller in her book 'Organizational Communication: Approaches and Processes' (2009). The first three situations were high in equivocality (tasks 1, 2, and 3) and last three situations were low in equivocality (tasks 4, 5, and 6).

4.10. Statistical Analysis

Microsoft Excel was used to calculate percentages and graphs. For most questions, the parametric statistic t-test was used to test mean difference (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). The aim of using t-tests was to test both cultures in this study and compare the results to determine if there is a statistical significance between both groups (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). To test this, t-test compares the mean scores for each group (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). The most important comparison in the thesis is high-context collectivistic cultures (HCC) and low-context individualistic ones (LCI).

For a very few number of questions, the nonparametric statistical test, chi-square (X^2) was used as it is suitable to these questions which were measured using nominal or ordinal levels of measurements (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000). The aim of using chi-square is to "show the relationship between expected frequencies and observed frequencies" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000, p. 269).

For both statistical tests used, the probability level (p), was set at 0.05 as it is conventional in mass media studies, which means that five times out of 100, there is a possibility that study results have a random error or are based on chance (Wimmer & Dominick, 2000).

4.11. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted before distributing the survey. The pilot study included 10 employees who did not take part later in the survey. The aim of the pilot study was to assess if there will be any difficulties faced upon distributing the survey and to test for any measurement errors. A couple of employees asked some questions in order to explore if their understanding was correct in regards to some questions and concepts. A few typos were corrected and some questions had to be rephrased for clarity.

CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

5.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to provide the results and analysis of the conducted survey by presenting the results of both cultures: high-context collectivistic (HCC) and low-context individualistic ones (LCI). Moreover, the analysis will answer the four research questions raised in this study and finally, will test both hypotheses and discuss whether or not support was found for them.

5.2. Description of the Sample

The results of the data for the first section of the survey, which are general warm-up questions, show that for HCC cultures about 58.1% were males and 41.9% females, whereas for LCI, 58.5% were males and 41.5% females. Regarding the age groups, for HCC cultures, 48.8% of the respondents were between 20 – 30 years old, 35.1% between 31 – 40, and 16.1 % were 41 years and above. As for LCI cultures, 21.7% of the respondents were between 20 – 30 years old, 35% between 31 – 40, and 43.4% were 41 years and above. Almost half of HCC cultures belonged to the younger age group, whereas about half LCI ones belonged to the older group.

Table 5.1. (HHC and LCI)
Age distribution table

Cultures	**20 – 30**	**31 – 40**	**41 and above**
HCC	48.8%	35.1%	16.1 %
LCI	21.7%	35%	43.4%

The country of residence question was used as a filtering question to segment respondents and differentiate between the results of respondents belonging to HCC cultures and those of LCI ones, in order to compare the preferred communication media across different cultures. For this question, 169 respondents were from HCC cultures represented in Egypt, UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Tunisia, Bahrain, whereas 143 were from LCI cultures represented in Canada, USA, UK, Germany, France, Czech Republic, and Switzerland.

5.2. Testing Employees Preferred Media Results

Q4. In the second section of the survey which tested the employees' preferred media within their organizations, the first question asked respondents about the frequency of dealing with multinational cultures within their organizations. Almost 78% from HCC cultures said they 'always' do, and 20.7% said they 'sometimes' do. Whereas 72% from LCI cultures said they 'always' do, and 25% said they 'sometimes' do. The mean for HCC cultures is 2.77 and the standard deviation (SD) is $\pm$ 1.246, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.69 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.119. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.079, and p is 0.9408. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

Q5. When respondents belonging to HCC cultures were asked about the importance of matching the communication medium to the task they are handling, 59.2% said they 'strongly agree' that it is important to match the medium to the task-at-hand. A percentage of 38.5 said they only 'agree' and only 1.8% were 'neutral'. For respondents from LCI cultures on the other hand, 33.6% 'strongly agreed' about the importance of such matching, 53.1% 'agreed', and 11.2% were 'neutral'. The mean for HCC cultures is

4.57 and the SD is ± 1.447, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.18 and the SD is ±0.905. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.512, and p is 0.6225. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below figures, both cultures either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' about the importance of matching the communication medium to the task-at-hand, with a higher percentage of the 'strongly agree' in HCC.

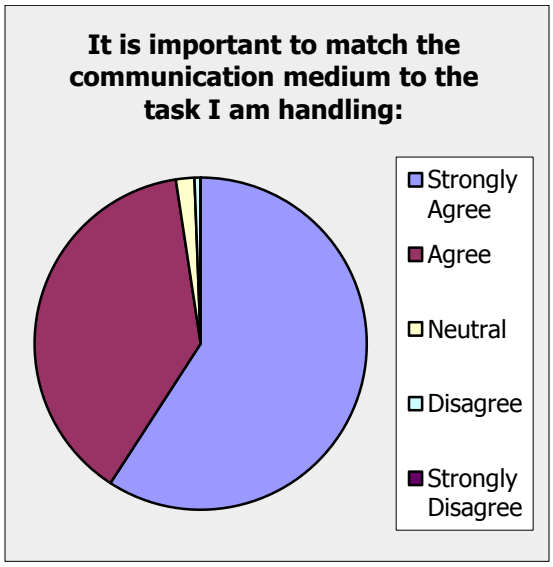


Figure 5.1.A (HHC)

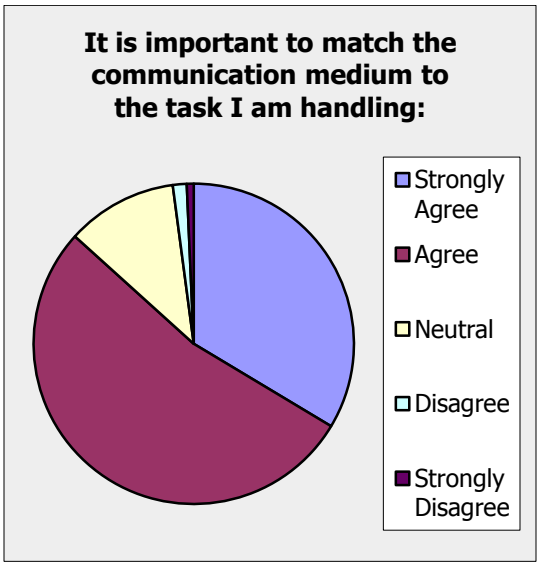


Figure 5.1.B (LCI)

The above figures illustrate the percentages of agreement of respondents in regards to the importance of matching the medium to the task-at-hand

Q6. In regards to the preference rating for the different communication media while communicating within the organization with colleagues and managers, for respondents from HCC cultures, more than 65% of the respondents rated face-to-face as an 'extremely preferable' communication medium, and 29.6% thought it was 'preferable'. When asked about their rating of video conferencing, the highest number of respondents, 40.2%, rated it as a 'neutral' communication medium, 32% thought it was 'preferable' and 18.3% thought it was 'not preferable'. As for the telephone, the majority,

totaling up to 65% of the respondents thought it was a 'preferable' medium, 20.1% thought it was 'extremely preferable' and only about 12% said it was 'neutral'. Regarding voice mail, more than half of the respondents, 50.3% perceived it to be 'not preferable'. As for e-mail, the largest percentage of respondents, 56.2%, believed it was a 'preferable' medium and around 30.2% thought it was 'extremely preferable'. Finally, when asked about their rating for memos, around 70% of the respondents thought it was either 'neutral' or 'not preferable'.

On the other hand, respondents from LCI cultures did not rate their media preference much differently than HCC. When asked about face-to-face communication, more than 55% of the respondents rated it as an 'extremely preferable' communication medium, and about 37% thought it was 'preferable'. As for their rating of video conferencing, respondents were equally divided between rating it as 'preferable' and 'neutral' with a percentage of 39.2% for each choice. A percentage of 15.4 thought it was 'not preferable'. As for the telephone, the majority, similar to the LCI, which is more than 65% of the respondents thought it was a 'preferable' medium, 10.5% thought it was 'extremely preferable' and only about 18% said it was 'neutral'. Regarding voice mail, a little less than half of the respondents and similar to HCC as well, 46.9%, perceived it to be 'not preferable'. As for e-mail, the largest percentage of respondents, 51.7%, believed it was a 'preferable' medium and an equal percentage of 22.4 thought it was 'extremely preferable' and another 22.4% thought it was 'neutral'. Finally, when asked about their rating for memos, more than 60% of the respondents thought it was either 'neutral' or 'not preferable'.

The mean for HCC cultures for *face-to-face* is 4.63 and the SD is ± 1.44, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.49 and the SD is ± 1.25. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.168, and p is 0.8708. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *video conferencing* is 3.14 and the SD is ± 0.54, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.28 and the SD is ± 0.67. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.363, and p is 0.7260**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *telephones* is 4.03 and the SD is ± 1.08, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.80 and the SD is ± 1.07. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.341, and p is 0.7419**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *voice mails* is 2.32 and the SD is ± 0.41, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.36 and the SD is ± 0.41. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.169, and p is 0.8700**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *e-mails* is 4.15 and the SD is ± 1.00, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.92 and the SD is ± 0.85. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.382, and p is 0.7124**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *memos* is 2.46 and the SD is ± 0.42, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.48 and the SD is ± 0.36. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.056, and p is 0.9567**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below figures, the highest preference rating for a communication medium was for face-to-face, whereas the lowest was for voice mail in both cultures.

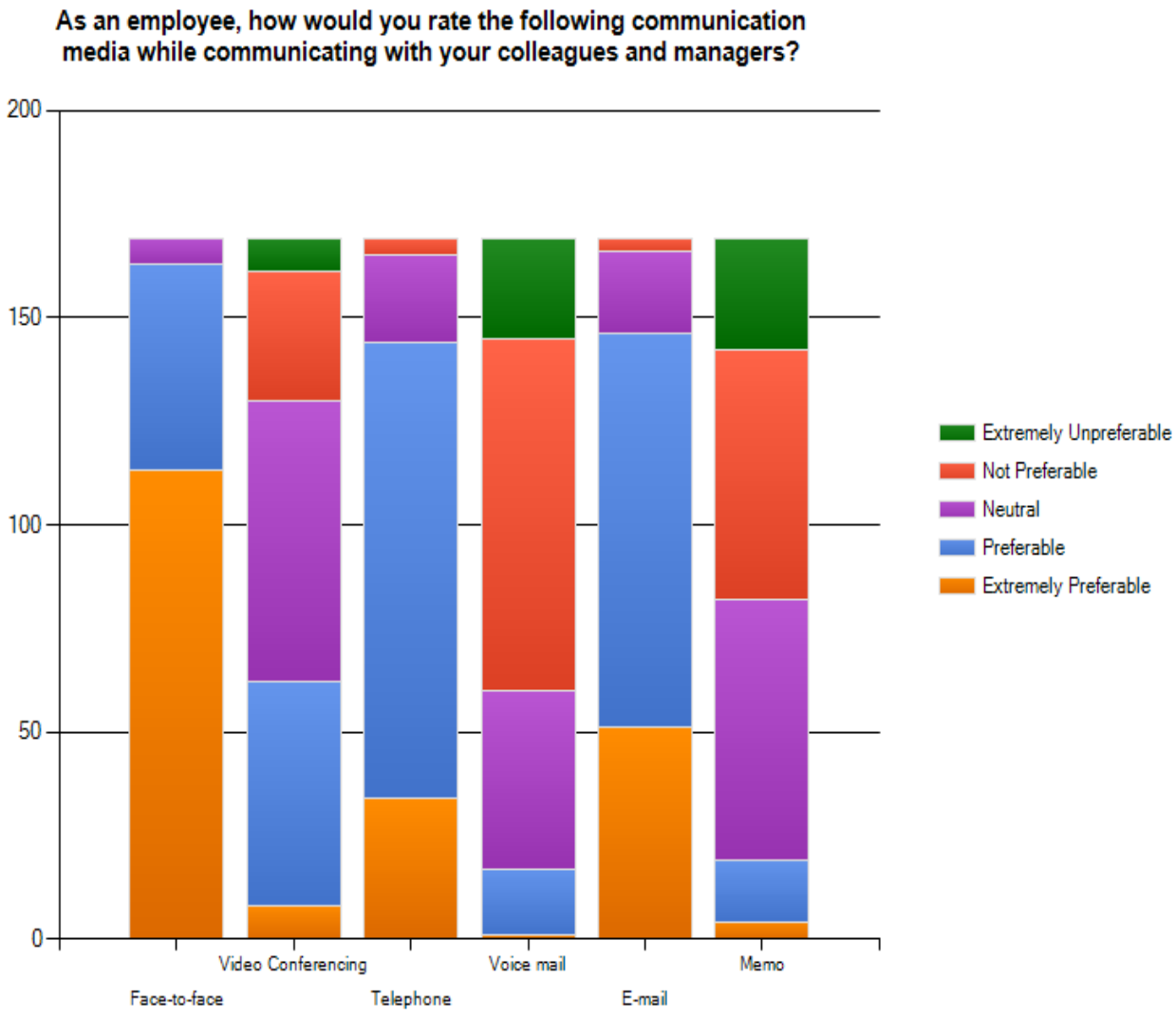


Figure 5.2.A (HHC)

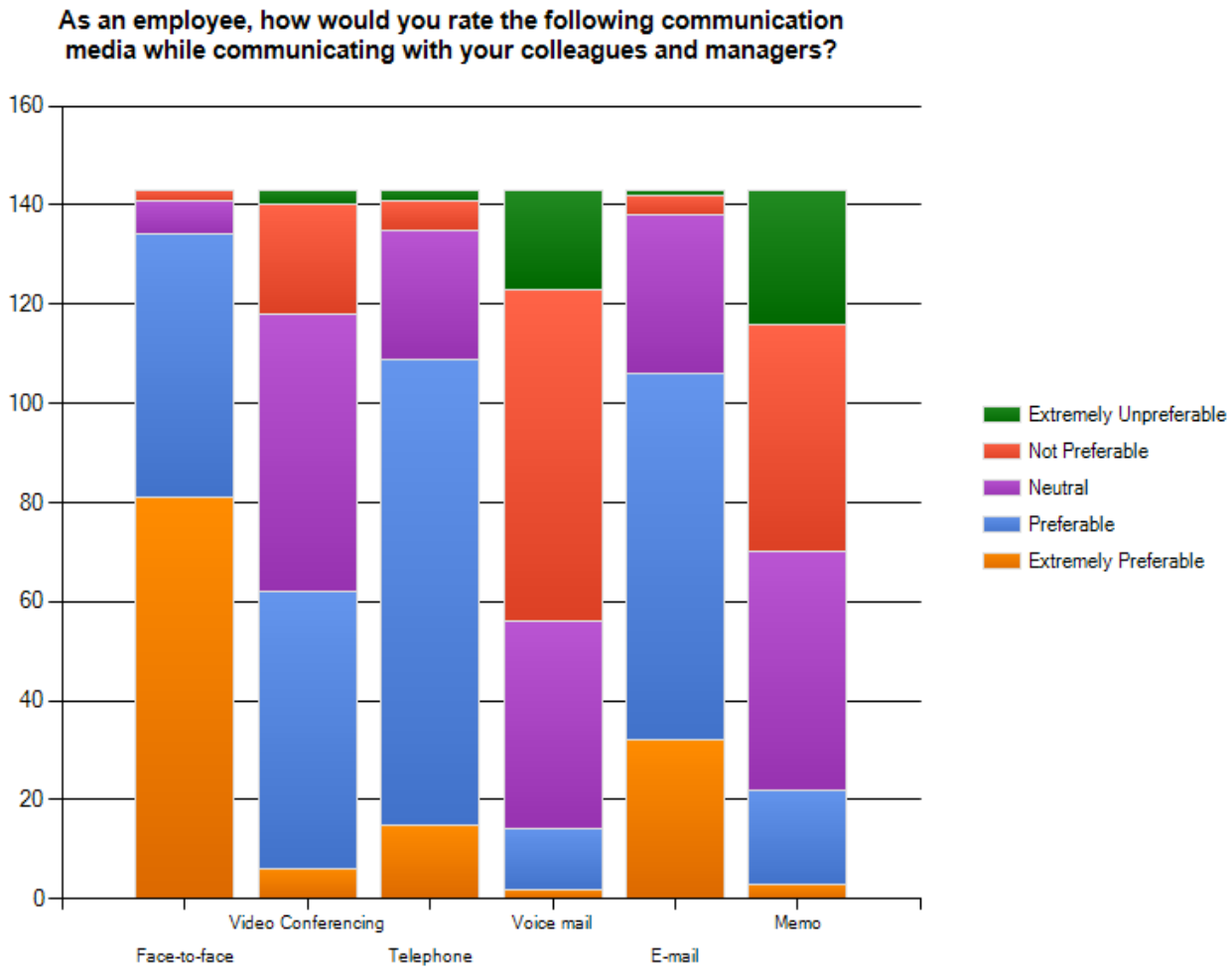


Figure 5.2.B (LCI)
The above figures illustrate the response choices for the preference ratings for the different communication media

Q7. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of several factors while choosing a communication medium within their organization. In HCC cultures, when respondents were asked to rate the 'availability of visual cues', more than 91% of the respondents thought it was either 'extremely important' or 'important'. As for their expertise or the expertise of the person they are communicating with in using a certain communication medium, more than 87% thought it was 'important' or 'extremely important'. The importance of the 'physical location of the person I am contacting' factor

was rated as ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’ by more than 65% of the respondents. As for the ‘time zone differences’, 78% thought it was an ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’ factor in deciding on the communication medium to use. Regarding the ‘importance of the task-at-hand’, 94% of the respondents thought it was an ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’ factor. When asked about the ‘nature of the task-at-hand’, more than 91% thought it was ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’. As for ‘the position/title of the person’, 66% of the respondents thought it was an ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’ factor while choosing a communication medium. Finally, more than 69% of the respondents thought that their relationship with the person they are contacting is an ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’ factor.

Similar results were observed for LCI cultures. When respondents were asked to rate the ‘availability of visual cues’, a little less than 90% of the respondents thought it was either ‘extremely important’ or ‘important’. As for their expertise or the expertise of the person they are communicating with in using a certain communication medium, 82% thought it was ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’. The importance of the ‘physical location of the person I am contacting’ factor was rated as ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’ by around 59% of the respondents. As for the ‘time zone differences’, 62% thought it was an ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’ factor in deciding on the communication medium to use. Regarding the ‘importance of the task-at-hand’, more than 82% of the respondents thought it was an ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’ factor. When asked about the ‘nature of the task-at-hand’, 86% thought it was ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’. As for ‘the position/title of the person’, almost 52% of the respondents thought it was an ‘important’ or ‘extremely important’ factor while

choosing a communication medium. Finally, around 69% of the respondents thought that their relationship with the person they are contacting is an 'important' or 'extremely important' factor.

The mean for HCC cultures for the "*availability of visual cues*" factor is 4.40 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.14, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.25 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.03. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.118, and p is 0.9090**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for "*my expertise and/or the expertise of the person I am contacting with that medium*" factor is 4.20 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.00, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.01 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.97. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.167, and p is 0.8715**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for the "*physical location of the person I am contacting*" factor is 3.80 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.70, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.57 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.62. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.228, and p is 0.8254**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for the "*time zone differences*" factor is 4.01 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.90, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.65 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.66. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.333, and p is 0.7477**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for "*the importance of the task-at-hand*" factor is 4.34 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.11, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.10 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.95. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.201, and p is 0.8457**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for "*the nature of the task*" factor is 4.24 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.07, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.11 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.04. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.111, and p is 0.9144**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for "*the position / title of the person I am contacting*" factor is 3.80 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.71, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.43 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.70. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.364, and p is 0.7253**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for "*my relationship with the person I am contacting*" factor is 3.85 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.75, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.75 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.84. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.097, and p is 0.9251**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below figures, the highest rated factor which affected the medium choice in both cultures was the availability of visual cues, without any significant difference between the two culture.

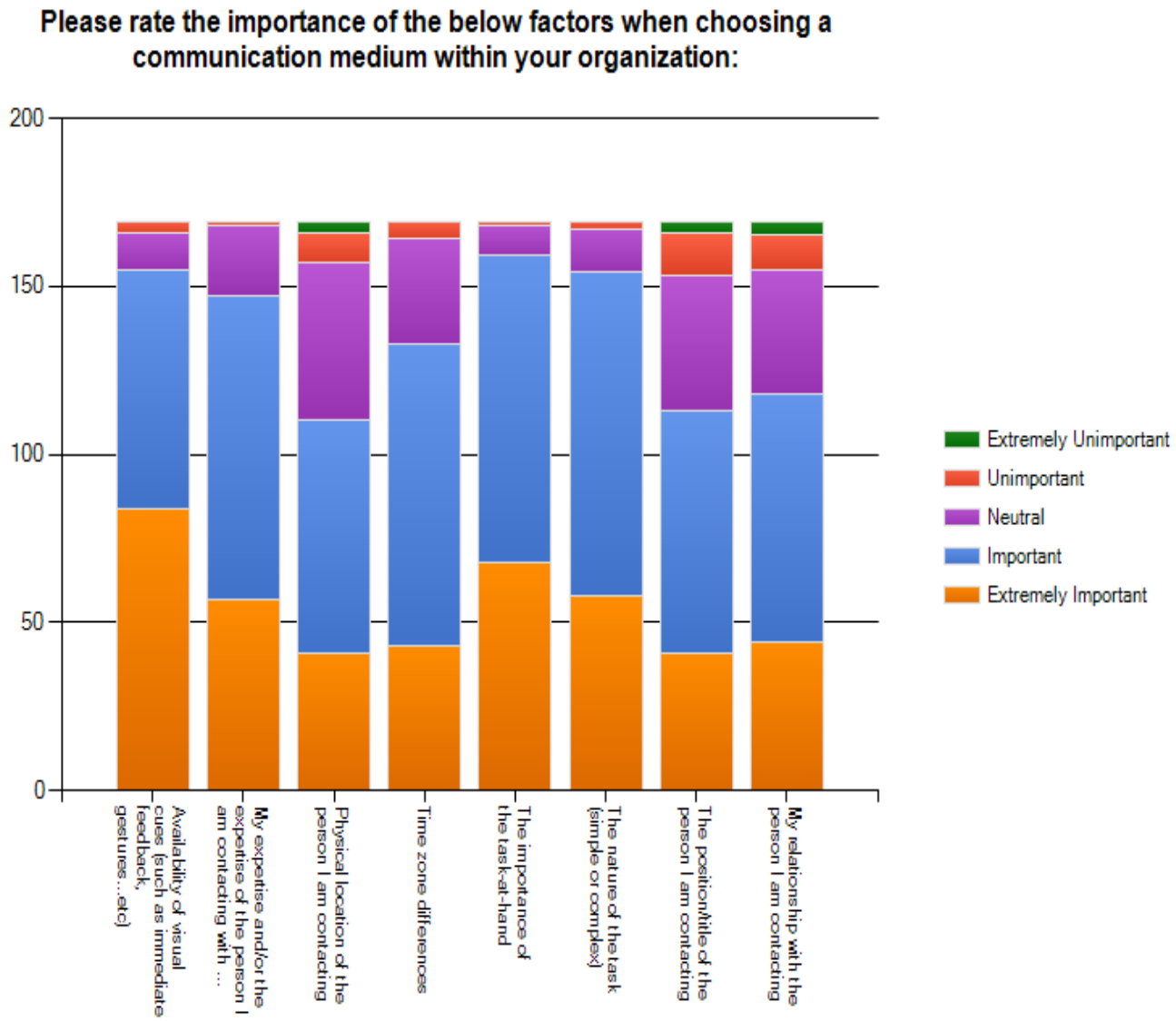


Figure 5.3.A (HHC)

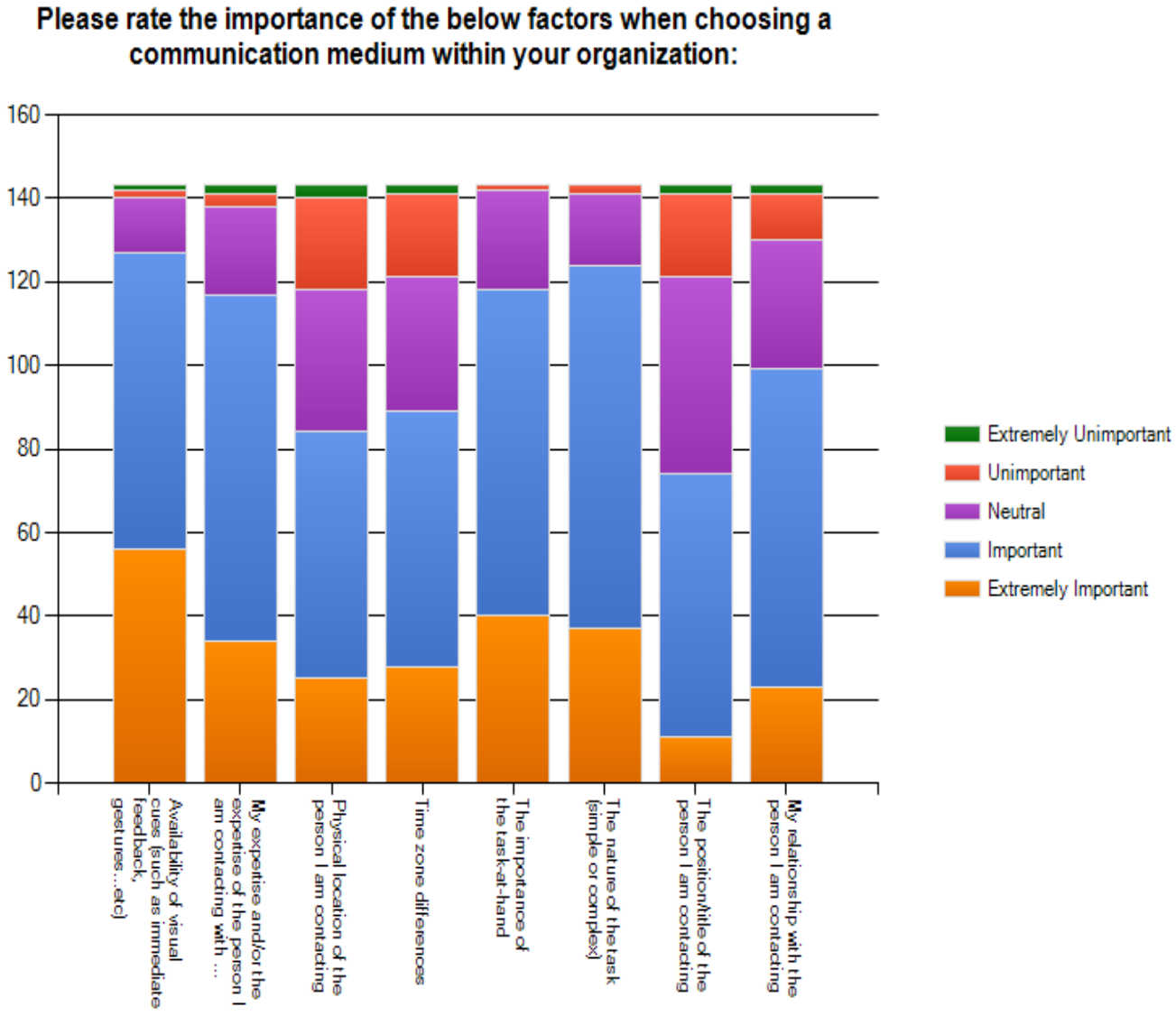


Figure 5.3.B (LCI)
The above figures illustrate the response choices for the importance of several factors affecting the media choice

Q8. Since this study aims to test MRT and its validity, respondents were asked about their level of agreement that visual cues make complicated tasks such as discussing confusing details about the employees' salaries more understandable. Within HCC cultures, 43.8% of the respondents said they ‘strongly agree’ and 45% said they ‘agree’ that visual cues make tasks simpler. Less than 10% said that they either ‘disagree’ or were ‘neutral’ about visual cues. On the other hand, within LCI cultures, 44.1% of the respondents said they ‘strongly agree’ and another 44.1% said they ‘agree’ that visual cues make a complicated task more comprehensible. About 10% said they were ‘neutral’ about visual cues. The mean for HCC cultures is 4.30 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.987, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.31 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.968. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.021, and p is 0.9838. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below figures, the percentages show that the majority of respondents from both cultures either ‘agree’ or ‘strongly agree’ that the availability of visual cues make a complicated task more understandable.

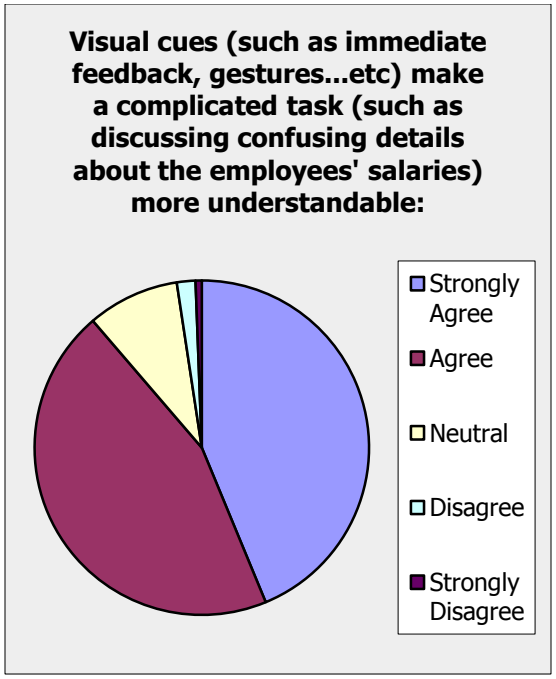


Figure 5.4.A (HHC)

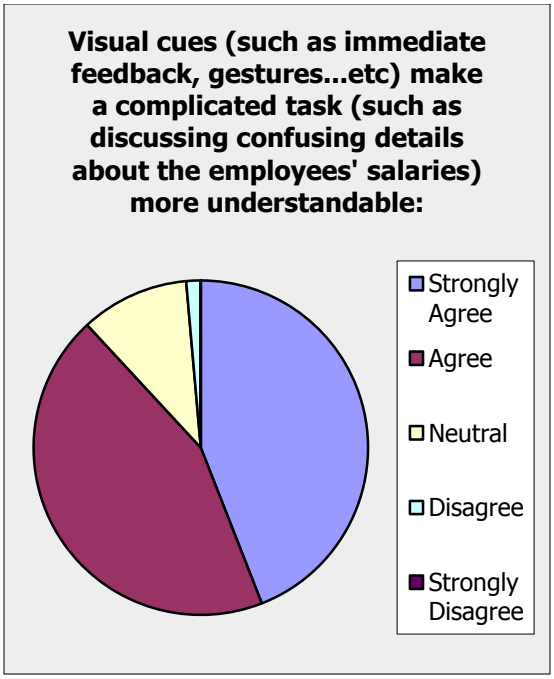


Figure 5.4.B (LCI)

The above figures illustrate the percentage of agreement for visual cues

Q9. For the purpose of cross-checking, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement that when working on a complicated task, it is better to use a medium that contains visual cues. For respondents from HCC cultures, 43.2% of the respondents said they 'strongly agree' and 46.2% said they 'agree' with the statement. About 11% said they either 'disagree' or were 'neutral' about it. On the other hand, 44.8% of respondents from LCI cultures said they 'strongly agree' that it is better to use a medium with visual cues while working on a complicated task, whereas 42% said they 'agree' and less than 14% said they either 'disagree' or were 'neutral'. The mean for HCC cultures is 4.31 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.989, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.29 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.950. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.032, and p is 0.9753. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

Q10. To further delve into the assumptions made by MRT that using a rich communication medium would make an equivocal task more understandable and simpler to handle, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement that face-to-face communication, which is perceived to be rich, is more suitable than e-mails, which is perceived to be lean, for complicated tasks. For respondents from HCC cultures, 87% of the respondents either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that face-to-face is more suitable. Similarly, for respondents from LCI cultures, almost 85% of the respondents either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement. The mean for HCC cultures is 4.25 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.944, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.24 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.934. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.024, and p is 0.9814. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below figures, the percentages show that the majority of respondents from both cultures either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that rich media is more suitable for complicated tasks.

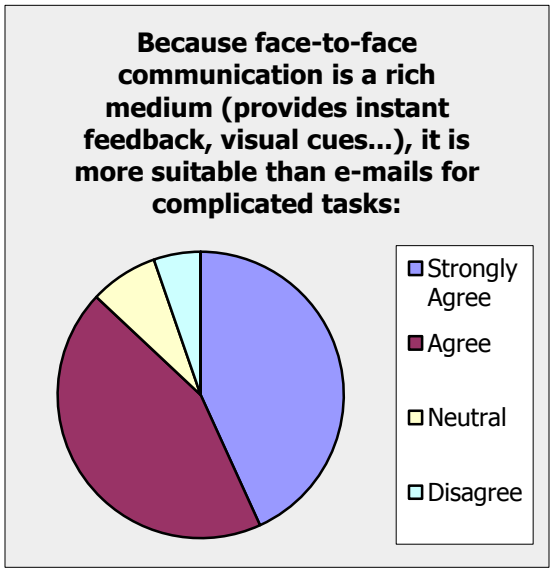


Figure 5.5.A (HHC)

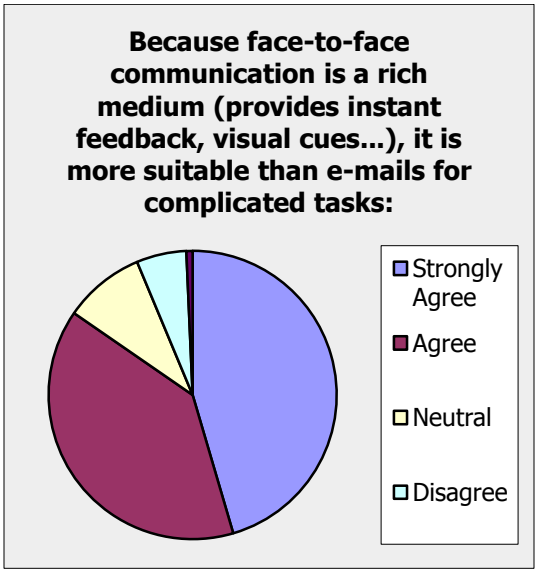


Figure 5.5.B (LCI)

The above figures illustrate the percentage of agreement that rich media are more suitable for complicated tasks

Q11. To further test MRT's assumptions, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement that e-mails, as a lean medium, are more suitable than face-to-face communications for simple tasks. For respondents from HCC cultures, more than 75% of the respondents either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that e-mails are more suitable for simple tasks, and only 16% said they were 'neutral'. For respondents from LCI cultures on the other hand, results were a bit lower than those of HCC cultures. More than 52% of the respondents said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement. However, 29.4% were 'neutral' and 16.8% 'disagree'. The mean for HCC cultures is 3.84 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.884, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.42 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.321. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 1.001, and p is 0.3461. Accordingly, the results are not significant indicating that there is no difference between HCC cultures and LCI ones.

As per the below figures, the percentages show that both cultures, with a higher percentage in HCC ones, agreed that lean media, such as e-mail is more suitable for simple tasks.

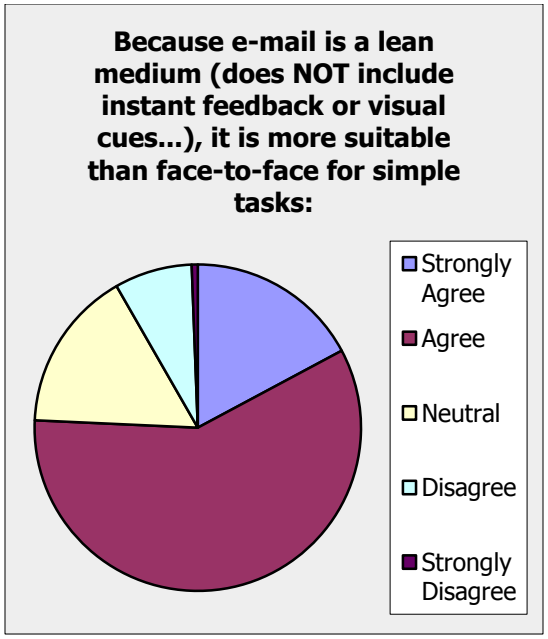


Figure 5.6.A (HHC)

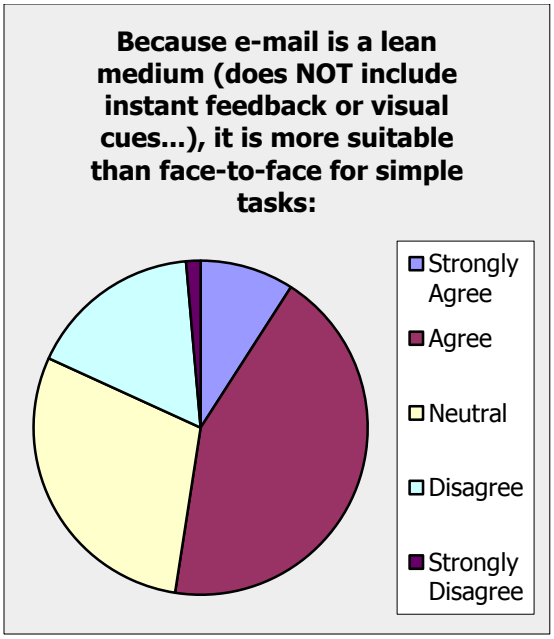


Figure 5.6.B (LCI)

The above figures illustrate the percentage of agreement that lean media are more suitable for simple tasks

Q12. Since one of the predictions of MRT is that using a suitable communication medium for the task-at-hand reduces uncertainty and equivocality, respondents were asked to rate their agreement with this accordingly. For respondents from HCC cultures, a little less than 90% of the respondents said they either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with this. As for those respondents from LCI cultures, and similar to HCC ones, the highest percentage of respondents, almost 83%, said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree', whereas almost 15% were 'neutral'. The mean for HCC cultures is 4.21 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.015, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.08 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.864. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.211, and p is 0.8382. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below figures, the percentages show that the majority of respondents from both cultures either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that uncertainty and equivocality is reduced upon using a suitable communication medium that matches the task-at-hand.

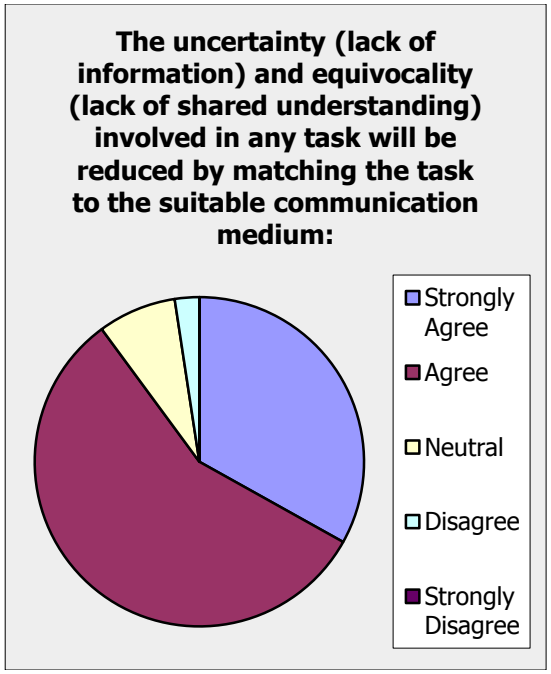


Figure 5.7.A (HHC)

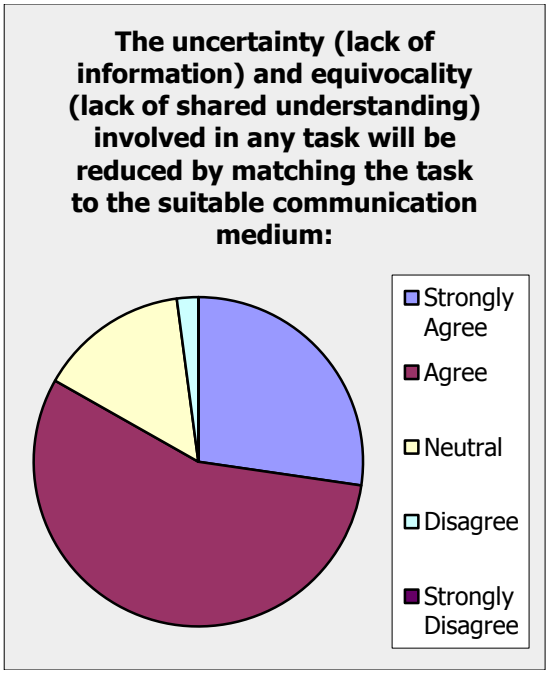


Figure 5.7.B (LCI)

The above figures illustrate the percentage of agreement
that using suitable media reduces uncertainty and equivocality

Q13. To further check MRT's assumptions and to cross-check what they have earlier said, respondents were asked about their level of agreement that using rich media such as face-to-face communication or telephone, will reduce uncertainty and equivocality in any task. For those respondents from HCC cultures, more than 92% said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree'. Similarly, the majority of respondents from LCI cultures, more than 80%, said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the statement. The mean for HCC cultures is 4.31 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.089, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.05 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.720. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.452, and p is 0.6633. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

Q14. In regards to the implications of choosing an unsuitable communication medium and whether this will lead to misunderstandings within the organization, 52.1% of respondents from HCC cultures said they 'agree', and 36.1% said they 'strongly

agree'. Less than 12% said they 'disagree' or were 'neutral' about it. As for respondents from LCI cultures, 56.6% said they 'agree', and 24.5% said they 'strongly agree'. Less than 19% of the respondents said they 'disagree' or were 'neutral'. The mean for HCC cultures is 4.21 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.938, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.98 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.864. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.405, and p is 0.6961. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

5.3. Testing Employees' Media Choices in accordance with their Cultures

Q15. In this third section of the survey, respondents were asked questions to test whether MRT applies across different cultures and whether or not HCC cultures and LCI ones have similar or different media preferences in different situations. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of several factors while communicating with someone within the organization. Results of both cultures were very close. Within HCC cultures, 50.3% of the respondents perceived visual cues to be an 'important' factor and 42% perceived it to be 'very important. When asked about establishing a rapport, 37.3% of the respondents perceived it to be 'important', and 54.4% perceived it to be 'very important. Going straight to the point was rated to be 'important' by almost 38% and 'very important' by 45.6%. When asked about the importance of building relationships, almost 52% thought it is 'important' and almost 39% thought it is 'very important'. Finally, when asked about the importance of expressing feelings and emotions while communicating within the organization, 36.1% said it is 'neutral', 34.3% rated it to be 'important', and only 12.4% said it is 'very important'.

Within LCI cultures, 46.9% of the respondents perceived visual cues to be an 'important' factor and 35.7% perceived it to be 'very important. When asked about establishing a rapport, 38.5% of the respondents perceived it to be 'important', and 52.4% perceived it to be 'very important. Going straight to the point was rated to be 'important' by almost 53% and 'very important' by almost 30%. When asked about the importance of building relationships, almost 45% thought it is 'important' and almost 41% thought it is 'very important'. Finally, when asked about the importance of expressing feelings and emotions while communicating within the organization, 44.1% said it is 'neutral', 28% rated it to be 'important', and only 3.5% said it is 'very important'.

The mean for HCC cultures for the "*visual cues*" factor is 4.33 and the SD is $\pm$1.09, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.43 and the SD is $\pm$0.93. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.288, and p is 0.7807**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for "*establishing a rapport*" factor is 4.45 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.20, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.65 and the SD is $\pm$1.16. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.059, and p is 0.9544**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for "*going straight to the point*" factor is 4.27 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.00, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.41 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.95. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.248, and p is 0.8104**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for "*building relationships*" factor is 4.28 and the SD is ± 1.06, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.5 and the SD is ± 0.98. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.093, and p is 0.9282**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for "*expressing feelings and emotions*" factor is 3.38 and the SD is ± 0.55, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.5 and the SD is ± 0.57. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.868, and p is 0.4107**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the table below, it is obvious that the percentage of respondents from both cultures were close in their perception of the importance of the tested factors.

Table 5.2. (HCC and LCI)
The table shows the importance of the different factors in different cultures

	Very Important		**Important**		**Neutral**		**Unimportant**		**Very Unimportant**	
	HCC	**LCI**	**HCC**	**LCI**	**HCC**	**LCI**	**HCC**	**LCI**	**HCC**	**LCI**
Visual Cues	42.0%	35.7%	50.3%	46.9%	7.1%	14.7%	0.0%	2.1%	0.6%	0.7%
Establishing a rapport (a relation of mutual trust)	54.4%	52.4%	37.3%	38.5%	7.7%	7.0%	0.0%	1.4%	0.6%	0.7%
Going straight to the point	45.6%	30.1%	37.9%	53.1%	14.8%	15.4%	1.8%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Building relationships	39.1%	40.6%	52.1%	44.8%	7.1%	11.2%	1.8%	3.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Expressing feelings and emotions	12.4%	3.5%	34.3%	28.0%	36.1%	44.1%	13.0 %	18.2%	4.1%	6.3%

Q16. To directly test MRT, respondents were asked to rate their preference for face-to-face, video conferencing, telephone, voice mail, e-mail, and memo for a simple/routine task such as providing someone with a customer's contact details. Within HCC cultures and in accordance with MRT, more than 43%, rated their preference for

face-to-face as ‘neutral’ when handling simple tasks, whereas almost 23% rated it to be ‘unpreferable’, and less than 30% rated it to be ‘preferable’ or ‘extremely preferable’. As for video conferencing, almost 45% thought it was ‘unpreferable’, and a little below 30% thought it was ‘neutral’. When asked about their telephone preference, 53.8% thought it was ‘preferable’, and 30.2% were ‘neutral’ about it. More than 70% of the respondents rated voice mail to be either ‘neutral’ or ‘unpreferable’. As for e-mail, and in accordance with MRT, more than half of the respondents, 53.3%, rated it to be ‘extremely preferable’, and 40.8% rated it to be ‘preferable’. Finally, memos were rated as ‘neutral’ by almost 35%, and ‘preferred’ by almost 20%.

Regarding LCI cultures results were very similar and percentages very close to that of HCC cultures. Almost 40% rated their preference for face-to-face as ‘neutral’ when handling simple tasks, whereas almost 25% rated it to be ‘unpreferable’, and less than 21% rated it to be ‘preferable’ or ‘extremely preferable’. As for video conferencing, almost 40% thought it was ‘unpreferable’, and a little below 30% thought it was ‘neutral’. When asked about their telephone preference, 47.6% thought it was ‘preferable’, and 32.9% were ‘neutral’ about it. More than 65% of the respondents rated voice mail to be either ‘neutral’ or ‘unpreferable’. As for e-mail, and in accordance with MRT, more than half of the respondents, 55.2%, rated it to be ‘extremely preferable’, and 37.8% rated it to be ‘preferable’. Finally, memos were rated as ‘neutral’ by almost 35%, and ‘preferable’ by 21%.

The mean for HCC cultures for *face to face* is 3.04 and the SD is ±0.46, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.78 and the SD is ± 0.39. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.953, and p is 0.3685**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *video conferencing* is 2.26 and the SD is ±0.38, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.08 and the SD is ± 0.39. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.725, and p is 0.4891**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *telephone* is 3.55 and the SD is ±0.88, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.41 and the SD is ±0.77. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.264, and p is 0.7985**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *voice mail* is 2.53 and the SD is ±0.42, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.66 and the SD is ±0.47. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.469, and p is 0.6516**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *emails* is 4.47 and the SD is ±1.20, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.48 and the SD is ±1.22. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.003, and p is 0.9977**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *memo* is 2.68 and the SD is ±0.37, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.75 and the SD is ±0.38. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.226, and p is 0.8269**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below table, the percentages show that the majority of respondents from both cultures preferred e-mail followed by telephone for simple tasks.

Table 5.3. (HHC and LCI)
The table shows the percentages of communication media preference for simple/routine tasks

	Extremely Preferable		Preferable		Neutral		Unpreferable		Extremely Unpreferable	
	HCC	**LCI**	**HCC**	**LCI**	**HCC**	**LCI**	**HCC**	**LCI**	**HCC**	**LCI**
Face-to-face	8.9%	7.7%	19.5%	14.0%	43.2%	39.9%	23.1%	25.2%	5.3%	13.3%
Video Conferencing	1.2%	0.7%	7.1%	2.8%	27.8%	28.7%	44.4%	39.9%	19.5%	28.0%
Telephone	6.5%	4.9%	53.8%	47.6%	30.2%	32.9%	7.1%	13.3%	2.4%	1.4%
Voice mail	1.2%	1.4%	13.6%	18.2%	36.1%	40.6%	35.5%	25.2%	13.6%	14.7%
E-mail	53.3%	55.2%	40.8%	37.8%	5.9%	6.3%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Memo	4.7%	4.9%	20.1%	21.0%	34.9%	35.0%	18.9%	21.0%	21.3%	18.2%

Q17. To also assess MRT, respondents were asked to rate their preference for the same previously mentioned communication media for a complicated/non-routine task such as explaining the progress of a project to a manager. Within HCC cultures and in accordance with MRT, almost 70% rated their preference for face-to-face as ‘extremely preferable’ when handling complicated tasks, whereas almost 23% rated it to be ‘preferable’. As for video conferencing, 37.3% thought it was ‘neutral’, and almost 35% thought it was ‘preferable’. When asked about their telephone preference, 55.6% thought it was ‘preferable’, and almost 22% were ‘neutral’ about it. Almost 80% of the respondents rated voice mail to be either ‘unpreferable’ or ‘extremely unpreferable’. As for e-mail, 46.7%, rated it to be ‘preferable’, 21.3% rated it as ‘extremely preferable’ and 21.9% rated it to be ‘neutral’. Finally, memos were rated as ‘unpreferable and ‘extremely unpreferable’ by more than 65%.

Regarding LCI cultures results were similar and percentages were close to that of HCC cultures. Almost 61% rated their preference for face-to-face as ‘extremely preferable’ when handling complicated tasks, whereas almost 33.6% rated it to be

'preferable'. As for video conferencing, 30.8% thought it was 'neutral', and 43.4% thought it was 'preferable'. When asked about their telephone preference, 61.5% thought it was 'preferable', and 21% were 'neutral' about it. A percentage of 78.3 of the respondents rated voice mail to be either 'unpreferable' or 'extremely unpreferable'. As for e-mail, almost 40%, rated it to be 'preferable', 18.9% rated it as 'extremely preferable' and 21% rated it to be 'neutral'. Finally, memos were rated as 'unpreferable and 'extremely unpreferable' by more than 65% of the respondents.

The mean for HCC cultures for *face to face* is 4.58 and the SD is $\pm$1.47, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.55 and the SD is $\pm$1.32. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.039, and p is 0.9698**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *video conferencing* is 3.25 and the SD is $\pm$0.58, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.31 and the SD is $\pm$0.68. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.151, and p is 0.8837**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *telephone* is 3.52 and the SD is $\pm$0.88, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.56 and the SD is $\pm$1.00. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.065, and p is 0.9498**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *voice mail* is 1.99 and the SD is $\pm$0.41, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.01 and the SD is $\pm$0.37. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.081, and p is 0.9374**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *emails* is 3.76 and the SD is $\pm$0.75, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.54 and the SD is $\pm$0.60. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.523, and p is 0.6151**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *memo* is 2.17 and the SD is ±0.22, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.19 and the SD is ±0.23. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.120, and p is 0.9074**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below table, the percentages show that the majority of respondents from both cultures preferred face-to-face followed by telephone for complicated tasks.

Table 5.4. (HHC and LCI)
The table shows the percentages of communication media preference for complicated/non-routine tasks

	Extremely Preferable		Preferable		Neutral		Unpreferable		Extremely Unpreferable	
	HCC	LCI	HCC	LCI	HCC	LCI	HCC	LCI	HCC	LCI
Face-to-face	69.2%	60.8%	22.5%	33.6%	5.9%	4.9%	1.8%	0.7%	0.6%	0.0%
Video Conferencing	8.3%	7.0%	34.9%	43.4%	37.3%	30.8%	13.0%	11.9%	6.5%	7.0%
Telephone	7.1%	5.6%	55.6%	61.5%	21.9%	21.0%	13.0%	7.0%	2.4%	4.9%
Voice mail	1.2%	1.4%	3.0%	4.9%	16.0%	15.4%	53.8%	50.3%	26.0%	28.0%
E-mail	21.3%	18.9%	46.7%	39.9%	21.9%	21.0%	7.1%	16.8%	3.0%	3.5%
Memo	2.4%	2.1%	11.2%	11.9%	20.7%	20.3%	32.5%	34.3%	33.1%	31.5%

Q18. In order to assess the applicability of MRT in regards to the media usage, respondents were asked to choose the most suitable communication medium in six different scenarios: three high equivocal tasks and three low equivocal ones. The choices made by respondents in both cultures supported the predictions of MRT. Within HCC cultures and for the three tasks high in equivocality, most respondents chose face-to-face as the most suitable medium. When respondents were asked about the most suitable medium, face-to-face was chosen by 89.3% when they need to discuss changes in their benefit package, by 81.7% when they need to explain a complicated matter to their manager, and by 81.1% when they need to resolve a conflict within their department. As for the three tasks low in equivocality, most respondents chose e-mail as the most

suitable medium. When respondents were asked about the most suitable medium, e-mail was chosen by 75.1% when they need to inform someone about an upcoming meeting, by 92.9% when they need to send someone a customer's contact details, and by 62.1% when they need to update their manager about last year's sales achievements.

Similarly and without major differences in percentages, within LCI cultures and for the three tasks high in equivocality, most respondents also chose face-to-face as the most suitable medium. When respondents were asked about the most suitable medium, face-to-face was chosen by 72% when they need to discuss changes in their benefit package, by 78.3% when they need to explain a complicated matter to their manager, and by 87.4% when they need to resolve a conflict within their department. As for the three tasks low in equivocality, most respondents chose e-mail as the most suitable medium. When respondents were asked about the most suitable medium, e-mail was chosen by 80.4% when they need to inform someone about an upcoming meeting, by 93.7% when they need to send someone a customer's contact details, and by 62.9% when they need to update their manager about last year's sales achievements. Chi-square (X^2) test between the two cultures in each scenario proved insignificant.

Scenarios	
-Need to discuss some changes about your benefit package	$\mathbf{X^2}$=9.667, p=0.0852
-Need to explain a complicated matter to your manager	$\mathbf{X^2}$=2.512, p=0.7747
-Need to resolve a conflict within your department	$\mathbf{X^2}$=3.913, p=0.5620
-Need to inform someone about an upcoming meeting	$\mathbf{X^2}$=2.765, p=0.7362
-Need to send someone a customer's contact details	$\mathbf{X^2}$=1.482, p=0.9151
-Need to update your manager about last year's sales Achievements	$\mathbf{X^2}$=4.250, p=0.5140

As per the below figures, the percentages show that the majority of respondents from both cultures preferred face-to-face for complicated situations, and e-mail for simple ones.

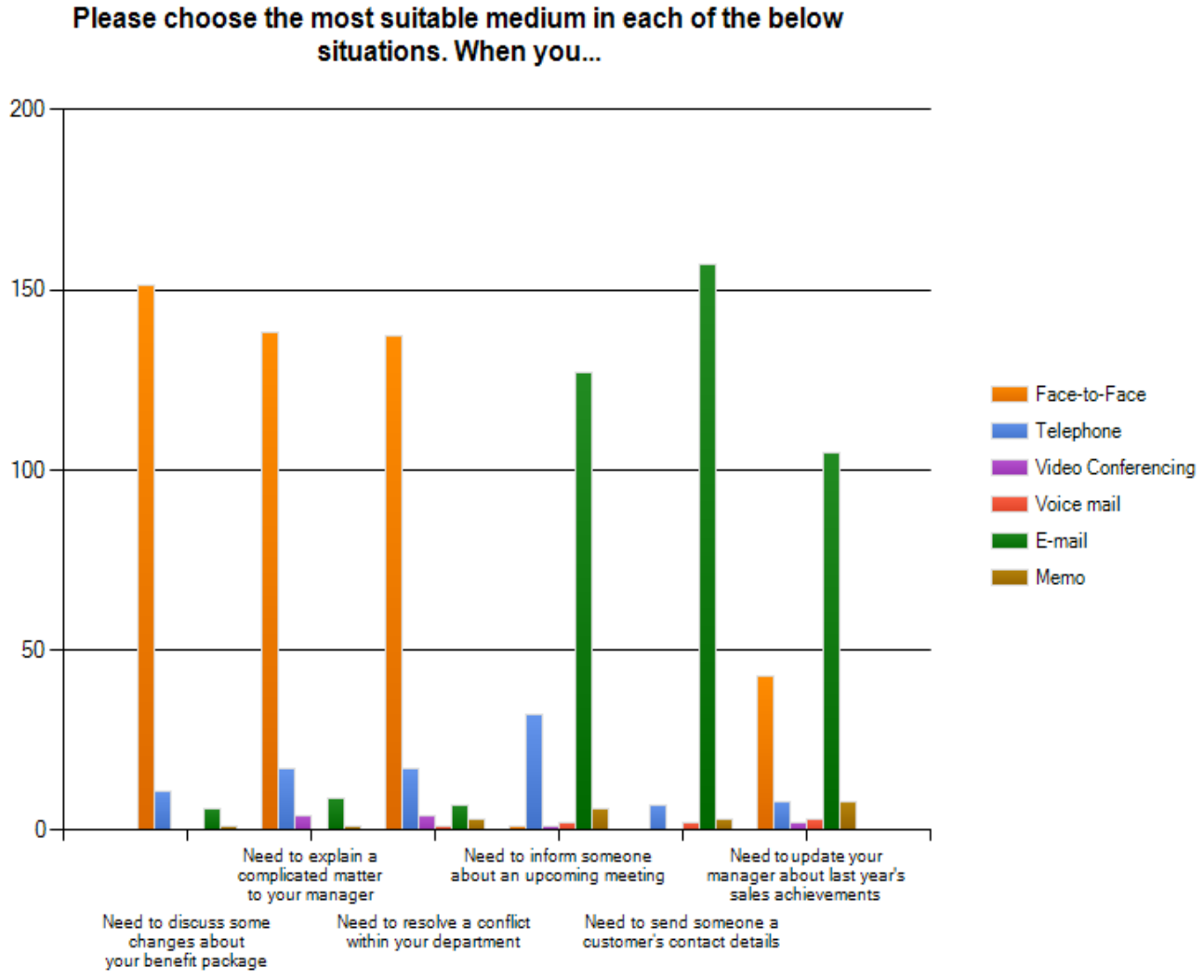


Figure 5.8.A (HHC)

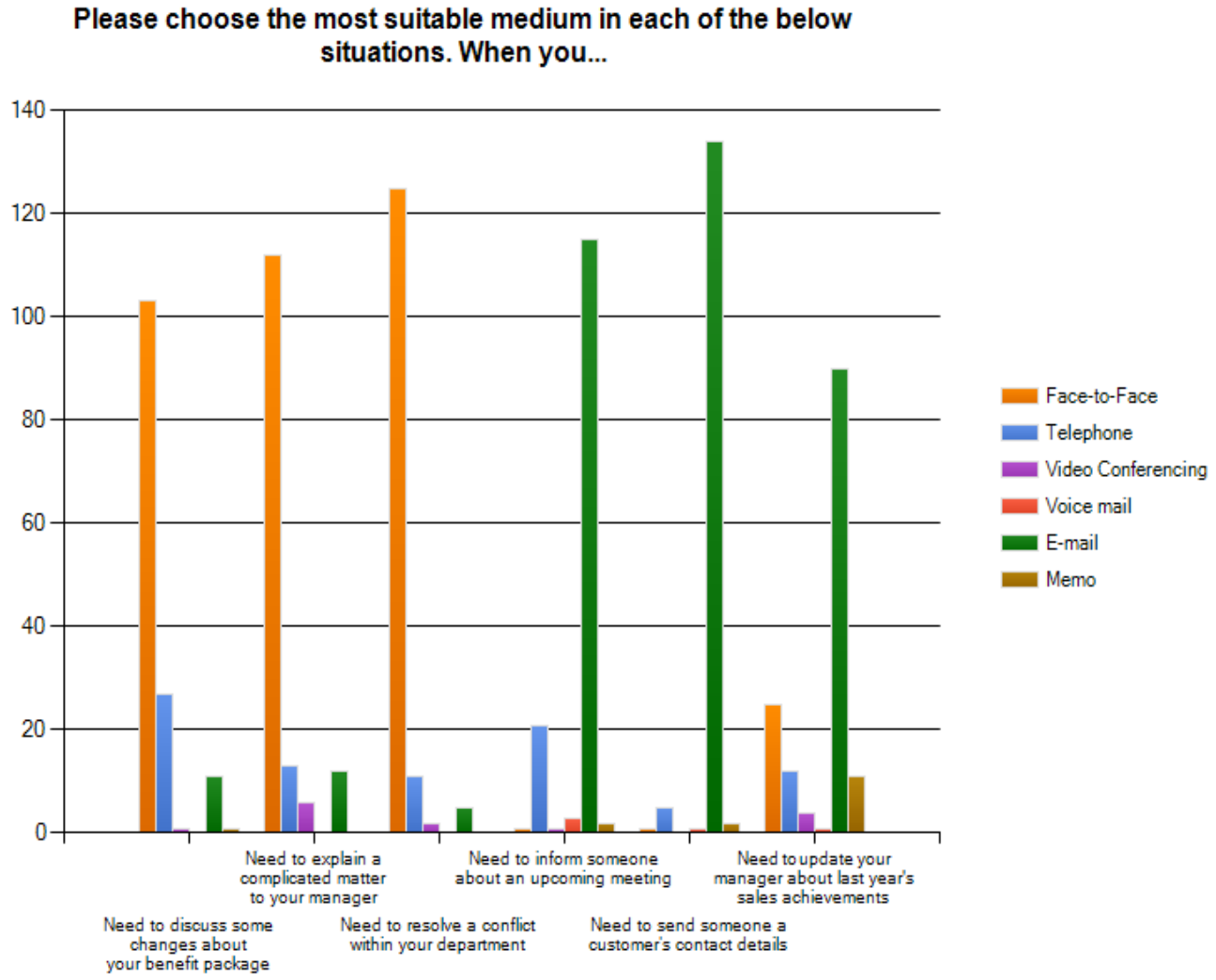


Figure 5.8.B (LCI)
The above figures illustrate the percentage of the media suitability in different situations

Q19. Respondents were asked if different cultures have different preferences for media usage. Within HCC cultures, 49.7 said they 'agree', 40.2% said they 'strongly agree', and only 7.1% said they were 'neutral' about it. On the other hand, for respondents from LCI cultures, 54.5% said they 'agree', 19.6% said they 'agree' and 22.4% said they were 'neutral' about it. The mean for HCC cultures is 4.27 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.994, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.90 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.740. The t-test value

for the difference between cultures is 0.655, and p is 0.5308. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below figures, the percentages show that the majority of respondents from both cultures 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that different cultures have different media preferences.

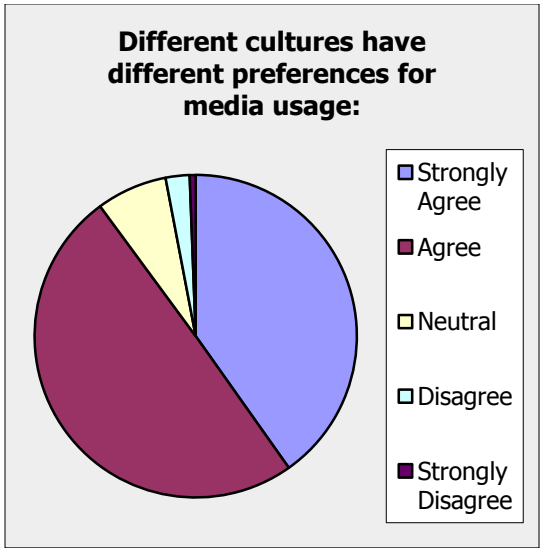


Figure 5.9.A (HHC)

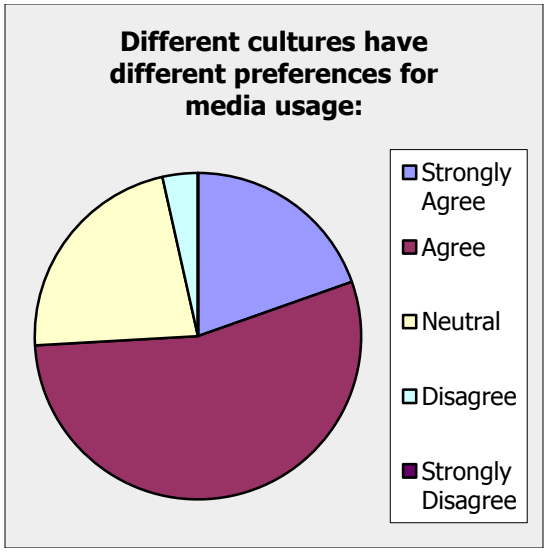


Figure 5.9.B (LCI)

The above figures illustrate the percentage of agreement that different cultures have different media preferences

Q20. When respondents from HCC cultures were asked if changing the medium they usually use within their organization while communicating with someone from a different culture will lead to better communication outcomes, 50.3% said they 'agree', 24.3% said they 'strongly agree', and 21.3 were 'neutral'. When respondents from LCI cultures were asked the same, 45.5% said they 'agree', 9.8% said they 'strongly agree', and 35% were 'neutral'. The mean for HCC cultures is 3.95 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.610, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.56 and the SD is $\pm$ 0.489. The t-test value for the

difference between cultures is 1.12, and p is 0.2952. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below figures, with a relatively higher percentage for those who chose 'neutral' from LCI cultures, the other percentages show that the majority of respondents from both cultures 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that changing the medium that is usually used while communicating with someone from a different culture will lead to better communication.

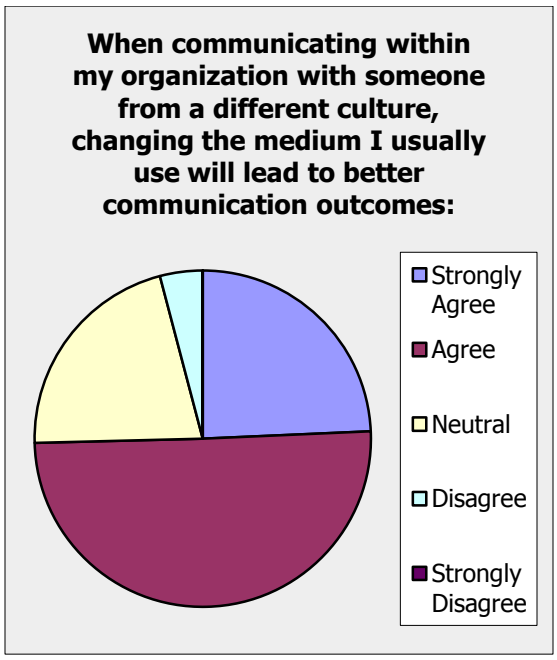


Figure 5.10.A (HHC)

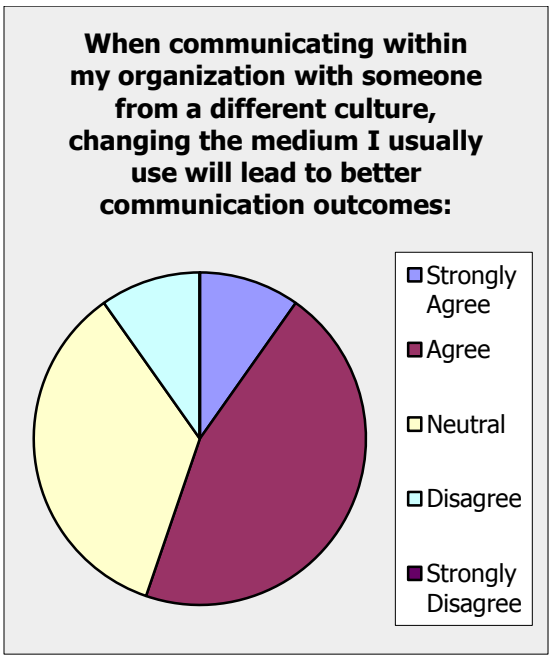


Figure 5.10.B (LCI)

The above figures illustrate the percentage of agreement
that changing the medium while contacting someone in a different culture leads to better communication

Q21. In order to compare the cultural preferences for media usage, respondents were asked whether they preferred rich or lean media most of the time. For respondents from HCC cultures, 70.4% preferred rich media, whereas only 29.6% preferred lean ones. On the other hand and unlike HCC cultures, for LCI cultures respondents, there was not a huge difference between those who preferred rich media and those who preferred lean

one. A percentage of 56.6 preferred rich media and 43.4% preferred lean ones. Accordingly, HCC cultures have higher preference for rich media. A significant chi-square (X^2) between the two cultures is 4.108, and $p = 0.0427$.

Both cultures gave reasons for their preference of either forms of media, however, as it is clear from the percentages mentioned, the preference for richer media was higher in HCC cultures.

Respondents who preferred rich media gave reasons for their choice such as receiving immediate feedback, leaving less room for misunderstandings, expressing themselves better, and saving time. Some have added that the use of rich media enables the communicator to go straight to the point while using visual cues, body language and tone expressions, as well as receiving instant, real-time feedback. Using rich media can also gauge the tone and attitude of the person one is interacting with and provide a suitable channel for some factors which are not transferrable via text, such as sarcasm. Some thought that using rich media is more influential and provides room for convincing the other party. It was also stated that the more personal the communication is, the better the relationship. When speaking face-to-face, there is less of a chance for communication errors, unlike lean media which leaves the communications path to be interpreted and there is no second chance for a clarification. Finally, few have said that rich media helps you build a rapport and good relations with others.

Respondents who preferred lean media gave reasons stating that e-mail is more official as one can always permanently document the communication, trace responsibility, and also document what is being said or done and hold people accountable for their work. Lean media are also better when it comes to numbers, statistics, and

graphs. Additionally because e-mails are written-media, they are more preferred by those communicators who do not speak the same language to avoid any accent-related problems. There is always a chance to revert back to what has been said earlier, read it over and over for better understanding and clarification, and to share messages with others by forwarding it to them. Lean media are more convenient, timely and faster to use. Some tend to believe that because face-to-face lack any documentation, therefore in a professional atmosphere it is better to use lean media, whereas face-to-face would be some kind of follow-up after using lean media. With lean media, you can also communicate with multiple people at the same time who are in different time zones. One can also use explanatory tools such as attachments, links, and websites. The use of lean media, unlike rich ones, is preferred because they do not compel communicators to respond instantaneously and therefore provide a better time to think, make informed decision, and communicate better, however, they can also provide instantaneous response if desired. E-mails are also ambiguity free because everything is put into written words, so it is easier for people across different cultures to understand. In addition, e-mails give the opportunity to carefully word and revise my message, and also keep a record. Also some respondents stated that they like responding to emails directly because they can quote the snippets they are replying to and thus put their message in a question and answer format. Others have added that they are working with teams which are geographically dispersed, so e-mail is the most efficient medium from a cost and time perspectives.

In support of MRT, some have reiterated what the theory has said that media choice is most of the time given by the context and not necessarily a matter of preference,

and that e-mail is more convenient, easier and faster to use unless the situation is critical, so face-to-face or telephones are more convenient then. Others have added that one can multi-task easier and deliver more by using leaner means, yet for complex and challenging tasks, it is better to use rich media and invest the energy and time required for a long-term benefit. On the other hand, some gave individually-based reasons that do not mesh with the theory's tenets such as being used to using one communication medium or the other, in addition to their personal preferences for speaking rather than talking, or for not preferring to talk to someone they do not know well via face-to-face or telephones.

As per the below figures, it is clear that respondents from HCC cultures have a higher preference for rich media.

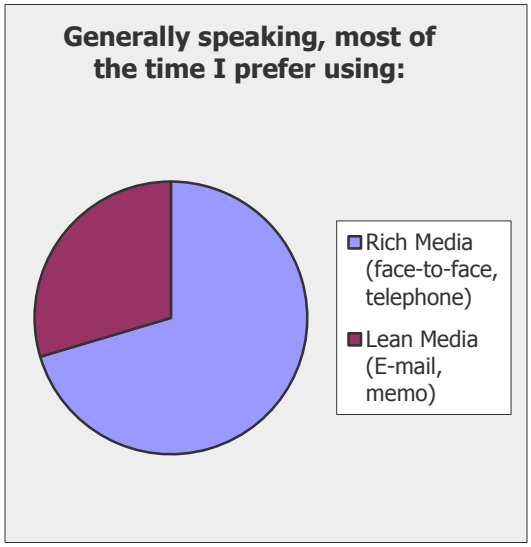


Figure 5.11.A (HHC)

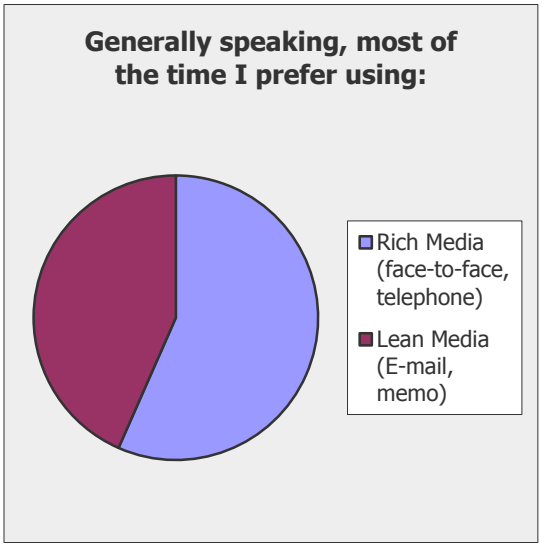


Figure 5.11.B (LCI)

The above figures illustrate the percentage of preference for media usage

Q22. To further assess if there is any difference for media preferences across cultures, respondents only from HCC cultures were asked to rank their media preference while communicating with someone from LCI cultures. Respondents from LCI cultures

were requested to skip this question, however, some of them answered it. Accordingly, within HCC cultures, 32% said that face-to-face communication was 'preferable', almost 25% said it is 'highly preferable', and below 31% said it was 'neutral'. When asked about video conferencing, 37.3% were 'neutral', and almost 30% said it is 'preferable'. Telephone communication as rated as 'preferable' by almost 58% of respondents. Voice mail was rated as 'neutral' and 'unpreferable' by more than 70%. As for e-mails, more than 88% of the respondents rated it as 'preferable' or 'extremely preferable'. Finally, memos were rated as 'neutral' or 'unpreferable' by more than 55% of the respondents.

The mean for HCC cultures (those who were requested to complete this question) is 3.26 and the SD is $\pm$0.82. As per the below figure, it is clear that respondents from HCC cultures prefer e-mails, followed by telephones and face-to-face while communicating with other cultures.

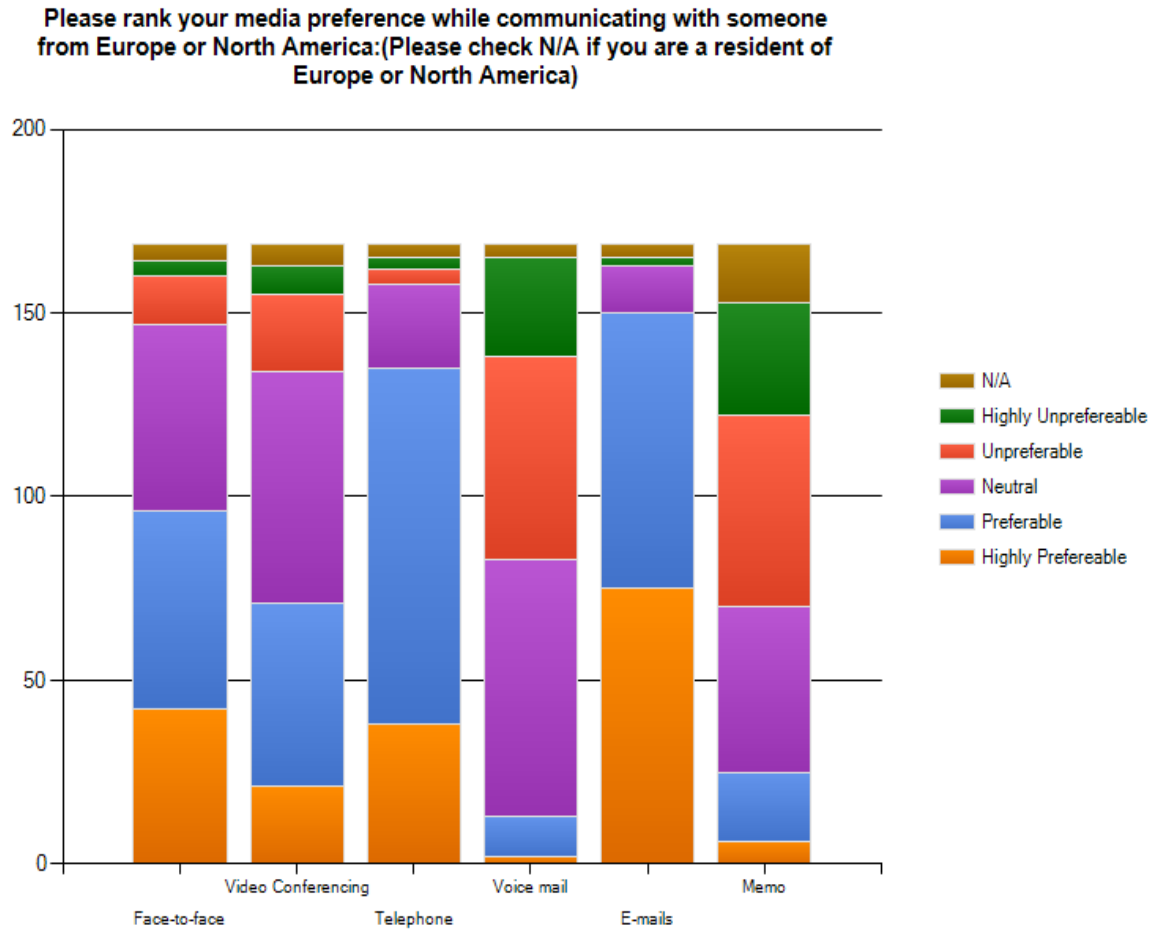


Figure 5.12. (HHC)
The above figure illustrates the percentage of preference for media usage by HCC cultures

Q23. Similarly to what HCC cultures' respondents were asked above, LCI cultures' respondents were asked to rank their media preference while communicating with someone from HCC cultures. Respondents from HCC cultures were requested to skip this question, however, some of them answered it. Accordingly, within LCI cultures and with very similar results, 23.8% said that face-to-face communication was 'preferable', almost 33.6% said it is 'highly preferable', and below 27% said it was 'neutral'. When asked about video conferencing, 34.3% were 'neutral', and 28% said it is

'preferable'. Telephone communication was rated as 'preferable' by almost 62% of respondents. Voice mail was rated as 'neutral' and 'unpreferable' by 70%. As for e-mails, more than 74% of the respondents rated it as 'preferable' or 'extremely preferable'. Finally, memos were rated as 'neutral' or 'unpreferable' by more than 62% of the respondents.

The mean for LCI cultures (those who were requested to complete this question) is 3.13 and the SD is $\pm$0.72. As per the below figure, and similarly to HCC cultures, it is clear that respondents from LCI cultures prefer e-mails, followed by telephones then face-to-face while communicating with other cultures.

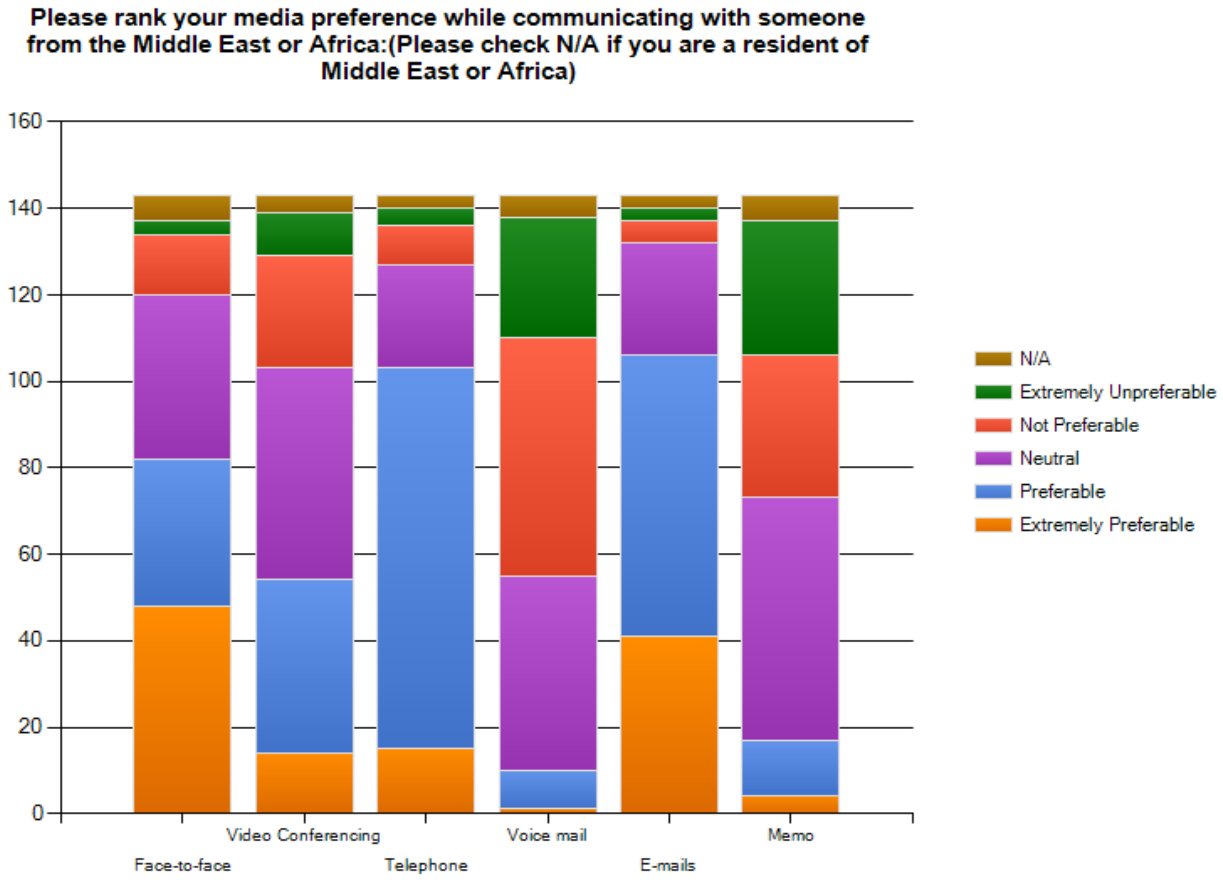


Figure 5.13. (LCI)
The above figure illustrates the percentage of preference for media usage by LCI cultures

For the purpose of this research, questions 22 and 23 were tested against each other to check whether or not there were any differences between both cultures.

The mean for HCC cultures for *face to face* is 3.60 and the SD is ±0.61, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.64 and the SD is ±0.66. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.100, and p is 0.9228**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *video conferencing* is 3.22 and the SD is ±0.52, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.07 and the SD is ±0.47. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.493, and p is 0.6353**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *telephone* is 3.89 and the SD is ±0.91, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.64 and the SD is ±0.94. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.405, and p is 0.6961**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *voice mail* is 2.37 and the SD is ±0.47, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.20 and the SD is ±0.40. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.634, and p is 0.5438**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *emails* is 4.24 and the SD is ±1.01, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 3.89 and the SD is ±0.79. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.582, and p is 0.5766**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

The mean for HCC cultures for *memo* is 2.22 and the SD is ±0.30, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 2.36 and the SD is ±0.42. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.597, and p is 0.5670**.** Accordingly, the results are not significant.

Q24. In a wrap-up question, respondents were asked to rate their agreement level as to whether choosing a suitable communication medium will contribute to the organizational effectiveness. Within HCC cultures, almost 70% 'said they 'strongly agree', and 29% said they 'agree'. As for respondents from LCI cultures, 47.6% said they 'strongly agree', and 49.7% said they 'agree'. The mean for HCC cultures is 4.68 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.764, whereas the mean for LCI cultures is 4.45 and the SD is $\pm$ 1.232. The t-test value for the difference between cultures is 0.244, and p is 0.8134. Accordingly, the results are not significant.

As per the below figures, it is clear that respondents from both cultures place a strong emphasis on the importance of choosing a suitable communication medium and its contribution to the organizational effectiveness.

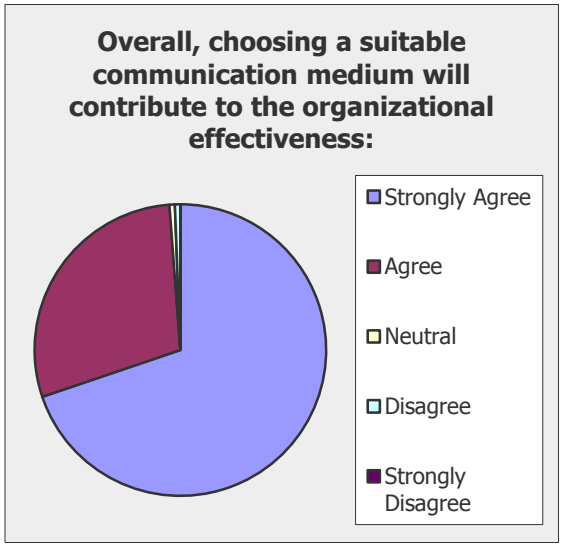


Figure 5.14.A (HHC)

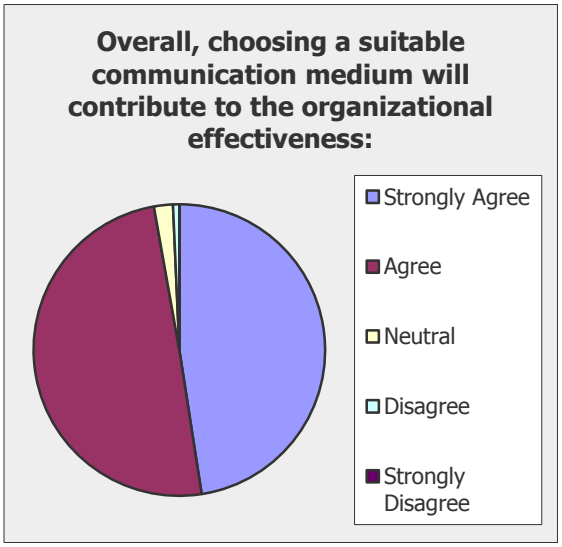


Figure 5.14.B (LCI)

The above figures illustrate the percentage of agreement
regarding the medium's contribution to the organizational effectiveness

5.4. Responses to the Research Questions

In this section, we will discuss each research question exquisitely based upon the earlier findings.

5.4.1. Research Question 1

What are the most important factors which influence employees within any organization upon choosing a communication medium?

In answer to this research question, and based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, respondents were asked to rate the importance of eight different factors namely; the availability of visual cues, their medium expertise and/or the expertise of the person they are communicating with, the physical location of the person they are contacting, time zone differences, the importance of the task-at-hand, the nature of the task (simple or complex), the position/title of the person they are contacting, and their relationship with the person they are contacting.

Results from respondents of both cultures combined found that the highest rated factor and the most important one which influences employees' media choice was the 'availability of visual cues', which was rated by 90.4% of the respondents as 'important' or 'extremely important'. The second highest rated factor was the 'nature of the task', which was rated by 89.1% of the respondents as 'important' or 'extremely important'. The third important factor upon which respondents choose the communication media within the organization is the 'importance of the task-at-hand', which was rated by 88.8% of the respondents as 'important' or 'extremely important'. The fourth factor, rated by 84.6% of the respondents as 'important' or 'extremely important' was the expertise of the communicators with the medium. Other

factors of lesser importance were the relationship with others and the position of the person they are contacting.

Accordingly, and from what the results of the survey have found, the results seem to be meshing well with the predictions of MRT where the availability of visual cues and nature of the task-at-hand are rated to be the most important factors when choosing a communication medium. Consequently, we could safely state that the majority of employees seem to be affected by the visual cues available in any medium as well as the nature of the task; whether it is simple or complex.

5.4.2. Research Question 2

As per the predictions made by MRT, can too little media richness or mismatching the medium to the task-at-hand lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding within organizations?

The results of this study found that the majority of respondents from both cultures, more than 92%, said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that it is important to match the medium to the task they are handling. Respondents also thought that visual cues, such as immediate feedback and gestures, make complicated tasks simpler, clearer and more understandable. The majority of respondents from both cultures, 88.5%, said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with this. Added to that, respondents agreed that when they are dealing or working on equivocal tasks, such as discussing confusing details salaries or explaining to their manager the progress of a project, it is better to use a medium that contains visual cues. The research results have also found that using face-to-face communication, which is a rich medium, for complicated tasks is more suitable than memos or e-mails. Almost 86% of the respondents agreed with this, which consequently lent support to MRT.

Additionally, the majority of respondents, from both cultures, agreed that the uncertainty, which is the lack of information; and equivocality, which is the lack of shared understanding involved in any task, will be reduced by matching the task to the suitable communication medium. In other words, and as per the assumptions of MRT, almost 87% of the respondents agreed that any misunderstandings, miscommunication, or uncertainty will be reduced while handling any task when using rich media for complicated tasks. Moreover, and on another 5-point Likert based scale, respondents were asked to rate their agreement ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' with the statement that using a rich communication medium will lead to reduced equivocality, hence better communication in any task. Almost 87% said they either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with this statement.

Accordingly, and based upon what has been found and what has been stated above, we can safely deduce that as per MRT predictions, little media richness in a task that requires richness will lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. In other words, when the task-at-hand is not matched to the suitable communication medium, miscommunications are bound to happen within organizations, that is, when employees use lean media, such as e-mails or memos, for a task that requires the use of richer ones, and vice versa.

5.4.3. Research Question 3

Is there a difference, as per MRT's predictions, in the media choices made when handling complicated tasks than when handling simple ones?

The survey results show that employees in general perceived a difference in their media choices and usage when handling simple tasks than when handling complicated ones. The majority of employees, almost 81%, said that they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that using a medium that contains visual cues is more preferable when handling complicated tasks. About 86% said that because face-to-face communication is a rich medium, providing instant feedback and containing visual cues, it is more suitable for complicated tasks, whereas more than half the employees, more than 65%, thought that because e-mail is a lean medium, it is more suitable for simple tasks.

Moreover, in accordance with MRT, the majority of employees, almost 94%, said that when handling simple and routine tasks, the highest preference was for e-mail, followed by 56.5% who chose telephone. On the other hand, for complicated and non-routine tasks, and in accordance with MRT as well, the majority of employees, 93%, said that when handling complicated and non-routine tasks, the highest preference was for face-to-face, followed by 64.7% who chose telephone. The results also found that there are very low preferences for memos and voice mails, which are lean, for simple tasks.

To further assess and confirm the validity of MRT, employees were asked to choose the medium they will use in six different situations; three complicated ones and three simple ones. For the three complicated situations; namely discussing changes in their benefit package, explaining a complicated matter to their manager, and resolving a

conflict within the department, the majority of employees chose face-to-face communication. On the other hand, for the three simple situations; namely informing someone about an upcoming meeting, sending someone a customer's contact details, and updating their manager about last year's sales achievements, the majority of employees chose e-mail communication.

In sum, it is concluded that employees preferred face-to-face communication for complicated tasks, and though not with high percentages, but more than half the employees preferred e-mail and perceived it to be more suitable for simple ones. These results indicate the level of equivocality in any task affects the employees' media choice.

5.4.4. Research Question 4

Do employees believe that organizational effectiveness can be reached upon making a suitable match between the task and the communication medium?

The survey results show that respondents believe that making a suitable medium choice has a strong and positive effect on the overall organizational effectiveness. A percentage of 92.6 of the respondents from both cultures said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that it is important to match the communication medium to the task they are handling.

Furthermore, 85% of the respondents said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that choosing an unsuitable communication media within their organization would lead to misunderstandings and miscommunications. In total, about 98% of the respondents believe that choosing a suitable communication media will contribute to the overall effectiveness of the organization. Consequently, the concluded results from the survey

found that if MRT is to be applied, that is, if employees within any organization make the right choice by choosing a rich medium for complicated and uncertain tasks, and a lean medium for simple and routine ones, organizations will be more effective and successful.

5.5. Hypotheses Testing

In this section, we will test the research hypotheses and give reasons for their support or rejection according to the earlier findings.

5.5.1. Hypothesis 1

Employees prefer rich media such as face-to-face communications, telephone calls or voice mails to lean media as e-mails or memos in highly equivocal situations.

To test this hypothesis, several questions were asked to test the employees' media preference in complicated tasks. Initially, employees, from both cultures together, were asked if visual cues make complicated tasks more understandable. Visual cues were defined as the immediate feedback and gestures, whereas complicated tasks were defined to be those tasks which entail confusing details such as discussing salaries-related matters. More than 88% of the employees agreed that when a task is complicated, using a rich medium will make it more comprehensible and understandable. To further cross-check the employees' consistency, they were asked if using a medium that contains visual cues is better while working on a complicated task. Again, the majority of employees, more than 88%, agreed with this. Additionally, more than 87% agreed that the uncertainty, which is defined as the lack of information, as well as the equivocality,

which is defined as the lack of shared understanding, would be reduced by using a rich communication medium.

As per MRT's assumptions, when employees were asked about the most preferable communication medium for non-routine tasks, the majority, 93%, said they prefer face-to-face, followed by 64.7% who preferred telephone communication. When they were asked about their most preferable media for routine tasks, more than 93% said they prefer e-mail. When combining the 'extremely preferable' and 'preferable' choices, the following table summarizes the results. A Chi-square test found $X^2=17.3$, $p = 0.0001$ which is highly significant. This result supports the hypothesis that rich media is preferable for complicated tasks whereas lean media is preferable for simple ones.

Table 5.5
Rich versus lean media preference

	Preference Percentage	
	Simple task	Complicated task
Rich media	29.4%	68.1%
Lean media	45.3%	27.6%

For further investigation and to further test this hypothesis, employees were given six different scenarios; three complicated and three simple ones and were asked to choose which communication medium they will choose for each scenario. Employees were able to choose between face-to-face, telephones, video conferencing, voice mail, e-mails, and memos. For the three complicated situations, the majority of employees selected face-to-face communication, whereas unnoticeable percentages of the employees selected the other communication media. When asked about wanting to discuss some changes in their benefit package, more than 81% selected face-to-face; more than 80% selected the same medium when wanting to explain a complicated matter to their manager, and 84% when

in need to resolve a conflict within their department. For the three simple situations, the majority of employees selected e-mails, with negligible percentages of the employees selecting the other communication media. When employees were asked about informing someone about an upcoming meeting, more than 77% selected e-mails, more than 93% selected e-mails when in need to send someone a customer's contact details, and about 63% selected the same medium when wanting to update their manager with last year's sales achievements.

It is clear from the results mentioned above that face-to-face communication was most preferred for the complicated tasks, whereas e-mail for the simple ones. The following table summarizes the results. The strikingly large differences resulted in a very high chi-square (X^2) = 124.9, and p = 0.0001 which is highly significant.

Table 5.6
Media usage in complicated versus simple tasks

	Percent of respondents	
	Face to face	E-mail
Complicated (discuss, explain, resolve)	81.8%	5.3%
Simple (inform, send, update)	7.6%	77.8%

These results indicate that, as per the predictions made by MRT, task equivocality is an important factor that employees try to match to a suitable communication medium. Based on what has been found, the employees' selection criteria of the different communication media differed with the different tasks-at-hand, as well as the degrees of equivocality involved. The only relatively low percentage was pertaining to the employees' choice of e-mails in the last scenario; updating their manager with last year's sales achievements. This scenario, which is categorized as an unequivocal one, had almost 22% of the respondents selecting face-to-face. The possible reason is that this task

could possibly be interpreted to include some numbers, statistics and graphs, accordingly and in this case, a rich communication medium, such as a face-to-face would be more suitable and beneficial as perceived by some respondents.

Accordingly, and based on what has been discussed above, the results imply that almost in all equivocal tasks and situations, employees prefer rich communication media to reduce uncertainty, decrease any potential miscommunication, and make the task clearer and more understandable. Consequently, this goes in positive direction with the predictions of MRT. Therefore, we can safely conclude that we found support for this hypothesis.

5.5.2 Hypothesis 2

High-context collectivistic cultures will prefer richer media in all communication tasks within their organizations more than low-context individualistic cultures.

This hypothesis was tested through filtering the responses of the 312 employees of both cultures, which consequently resulted in 169 respondents from HCC cultures and 143 respondents from LCI ones.

The results found that HCC cultures and LCI ones said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with percentages of 97.7 and 86.7 respectively that it is important to match the communication medium to the task-at-hand. Employees from both cultures were asked to rate their preferences regarding several different communication media, namely; face-to-face, video conferencing, telephone, voice mail, e-mail, and memos. Regarding HCC cultures, a percentage of 96.5 said that using face-to-face communication was 'preferable' or 'extremely preferable'. Furthermore, videoconference was rated as

'preferable' or 'extremely preferable' by 36.7% of the employees and telephone by 85.2%, where both media are categorized to be rich. In regards to lean media, 10.1% thought voice mail was 'preferable' or 'extremely preferable', whereas 86.4% thought the same about e-mails, and 11.3 about memos.

In comparison, when LCI cultures were asked about their rating preference for rich media, 93.7% said that face-to-face was 'preferable' or 'extremely preferable', 43.4% said the same about video conferencing, and 76.2% said the same about telephone. In regards to lean media, 9.8% said voice mail was 'preferable' or 'extremely preferable', whereas 74.1% said the same about e-mail, and 15.5% said the same about memos. Based on that, face-to-face was the highest rated medium by both cultures. Additionally, and as per the statistical tests conducted earlier, the t-test for the difference between the two cultures resulted in a 't' value of 0.128, and $p = 0.9007$ which is insignificant.

For further confirmation, the average of the three rich media for both cultures; face-to-face, video conferencing, and telephone was calculated. For HCC cultures the average was almost 73%, whereas the average for LCI cultures was almost 71%, whereby it can be accordingly stated that rich media is only slightly preferable by HCC cultures, but there are not any measureable differences.

Added to the above, and to further test this hypothesis, and verify whether or not there is a higher preference for rich media by HCC cultures, employees were asked to rate the importance of several factors while choosing a communication medium within their organization. These factors included the physical location of the person they were contacting, the nature of the task (simple or complex), the nature of the task-at-hand, the availability of visual cues (immediate feedback, gestures…etc), and time zone

differences. For the purpose of this hypothesis, we will focus on the availability of visual cues, a fundamental constituent for communication media to be perceived as rich, which a slightly higher percentage of employees in HCC cultures rated it to be of higher importance than LCI ones. A percentage of 91.7 from HCC cultures thought that visual cues were 'important' or 'extremely important', whereas 88.9% of LCI cultures rated it to be 'important' or 'extremely important'. Accordingly, the importance of the availability of visual cues was only slightly higher within HCC cultures. As per the results of the statistical tests mentioned earlier, the t-test for the difference between the two cultures in regards to visual cues resulted in a 't' value of 0.118, and $p = 0.9090$ which is insignificant.

Furthermore, there was a strong agreement between both cultures that using a medium that contains visual cues would make a complicated task easier. When they were asked about their level of agreement that using a rich communication medium will reduce the uncertainty and equivocality involved in any complex task, there was only a slight difference of about 12% between both cultures. A percentage of almost 93 from HCC cultures said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that using a rich medium reduces uncertainty, whereas less than 81% from LCI cultures said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with this. Accordingly, rich media seems to be perceived of slightly higher importance by HCC cultures than LCI ones. However, and as it is noticed from the very slight differences in percentages between both cultures, the statistical tests as well showed that the difference between both cultures was insignificant, a t-value of 0.452, and $p = 0.6633$.

When asked about the suitability of e-mail, as a lean medium, in handling simple tasks, more than 75% of respondents from HCC cultures said they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that it was a suitable medium, whereas only less than 53% of LCI cultures' respondents said the same. However, the t-test for the difference between the two cultures proved to be insignificant; a t-value value of 1.001, and $p = 0.3461$.

Once again, and for the purpose of cross-checking, employees from HCC cultures and LCI ones were asked to rate the importance of several factors while communication with someone within their organization which included visual cues, going straight to the point, establishing a rapport, expressing feelings and emotions, and building relationships. For the purpose of this hypothesis, we chose only three factors to compare. The first was visual cues, which is an integral component in rich media as mentioned earlier. It was found that within HCC cultures, 92.3% rated visual cues to be 'important' or 'very important', whereas 82.6% from LCI cultures thought the same. The t-test for the difference between the two cultures in regards to visual cues proved to be insignificant; a t-value value of 0.288, and $p = 0.7807$. The second factor we compared was building relationships, which usually require richer forms of media to work upon. The results found that within HCC cultures, 91.2% thought that building relationships was 'important' or extremely important', whereas 85.4% of LCI cultures thought the same. The t-test for the difference between the two cultures in regards to building relationships proved to be insignificant; a t-value value of 0.093, and $p = 0.9282$. Finally, the third factor which was compared was expressing feelings and emotions, which also require relatively rich media. A percentage of 46.7 from HCC cultures thought that this was an 'important' or 'extremely important factor', whereas only 31.5% of LCI cultures

thought the same. The t-test for the difference between the two cultures in regards to expressing feelings and emotions proved to be insignificant; a t-value value of 0.868, and $p = 0.4107$.

Accordingly, we can further infer that the percentages for the importance rating for visual cues, building relationships, and expressing feelings and emotions was only slightly higher in HCC cultures than LCI ones without any significant differences between both cultures.

Added to the above, employees were asked to rate their media preferences when handling a simple, routine task such as providing someone with a customer's contact details. For the sake of this hypothesis, the preference for rich media was assessed. Within HCC cultures, 28.4% of the respondents said that face-to-face communication was 'preferable' or 'extremely preferable', whereas 21.7% from LCI cultures said the same. The preferences for other rich media such as video-conferencing and telephone were still slightly higher in HCC cultures than in LCI ones where the preference rates were 8.3% for video conference in HCC cultures, and 3.5% in LCI ones, and 60.3% for telephone in HCC cultures, and 52.5% for LCI ones.

For further confirmations and to assess the assumption made by the hypothesis, we compared the averages of the rich media preferences combined for HCC cultures and LCI cultures which were found to be 32.3% and 25.9% respectively. Consequently, and based on the results stated above, we can deduce that for simple tasks, there was no difference between both cultures in their preference, as they both preferred lean media. Additionally, there was no difference in their preference of rich media. Accordingly, the

difference between both cultures did not prove significant; a t-test value of 0.138, and p = 0.8930.

Similar to the above question, respondents were asked to rate their media preference while handling a complicated and non-routine task such as explaining the progress of a project. Upon comparing the percentages of each culture, it was found that when handling a complicated task, 91.7% of HCC cultures said that face-to-face was 'preferable' or 'extremely preferable', 43.2% said the same for video conferencing, and 62.7 for telephones. On the other hand, 94.4% of LCI cultures said that face-to-face was 'preferable' or 'extremely preferable' for handling complicated tasks, 50.4% said the same for video conferencing, and 67.1% for telephones.

According to these results, and upon comparing the percentages of preference of both cultures for rich media, we can infer that, unlike the assumptions made by the hypothesis, there was no difference between both cultures; actually, LCI cultures were even slightly higher in their face-to-face preference in complicated tasks. Consequently, and based on the insignificant differences between both cultures, the t-test for the difference between the two cultures resulted in a 't' value of 0.033, and p = 0.9743 which is insignificant.

To further validate the results, employees were given six different scenarios; three which are high in equivocality, and three low in equivocality. For the three scenarios which are high in equivocality, the average percentage for HCC cultures' preference for rich media combined (face-to-face, telephone, and video conferencing) was 94.5%, whereas for LCI cultures, the average percentage for the employees' preferences for rich media combined was 93.2%. For the three simple tasks, the average percentage for HCC

cultures' preference for rich media combined (face-to-face, telephone, and video conferencing) was 19.4%, as opposed to 16.3% in LCI cultures. Based on such results, we can see that the preference for rich media by both cultures is the same in the different communication tasks. Accordingly, and like all the above responses, a chi-square (X^2) test between the two cultures in each scenario proved insignificant.

Finally, in an overall conclusive question, employees were asked if they prefer using rich media or lean one. The results found that 70.4% of HCC cultures said they prefer rich media, whereas 56.6% of LCI cultures said they prefer rich one. Responses to this question indicate that when directly asked about the media preference, HCC cultures preferred rich media more than LCI ones. A significant chi-square (X^2) between the two cultures result is 4.108, and $p = 0.0427$.

Accordingly, and based on all the results which has been concluded and analyzed above, it is clear that, although in most cases there are slight differences in percentages between HCC cultures and LCI ones, yet the difference did not prove significant in almost all cases and scenarios. Consequently, we failed to support the research hypothesis as we found that there is no measurable or significant difference between cultures in their media preference while communicating within organizations.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1. Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to discussing and further analyzing the findings and outcomes which were examined in the previous chapter. Additionally, this chapter will discuss the limitations and provide recommendations which can be beneficial for future studies and research.

6.2. Discussion of the Results

First, this research found significant support for the hypothesis which stated that employees prefer rich media such as face-to-face communications, telephone calls or voice mails to lean media as e-mails or memos in highly equivocal situations. Generally speaking, employees acknowledged a difference in their media choices when handling simple tasks than when handling complicated ones. Face-to-face, as a rich medium, providing instant feedback and containing visual cues, was perceived to be most suitable for complicated tasks, followed by telephone. For simple tasks on the other hand, e-mail as a lean medium, was perceived to be most suitable, and followed by telephone as well.

In further support of MRT, the majority of employees agreed that using a medium that contains visual cues is preferable when handling complicated tasks. Additionally, employees believed that any misunderstandings or uncertainty will be reduced while handling any task when using rich media for complicated tasks and that little media richness in a task that requires richness will lead to miscommunication and misunderstanding. These results indicate that, as per the predictions made by MRT, task

equivocality is an important factor that employees try to match to a suitable communication medium as the employees' selection criteria of media differed with the different tasks and degrees of equivocality.

It is worth noting that in several instances, there was a relatively high preference for telephones in simple and complicated tasks. Although MRT states that telephones are rich media, that is, they are more suitable for complicated tasks; however, the overall results of this study found that telephones are highly used in simple and complicated tasks alike. Additionally, there was not a strong preference in regards to the usage of video conference, voice mail, or memos in complicated or simple tasks; accordingly, it was not clear in which types of tasks these media were used most. Such findings are explainable through several possible reasons. Generally speaking, telephones are easy-to-use, relatively inexpensive and widely accessible media to everyone. At times, telephones can act as the richest available communication media in case of contacting someone in a different location. Accordingly, their use in all situations is justifiable and comprehensible for they can be a suitable medium at all times. Video conferences, voice mails, and memos are not widely used on the other hand for several reasons, possibly for reasons having to do with accessibility, voice and picture quality in case of video conferences, ease of use, or for being replaced by more advanced and easier to use alternate forms of media in case of memos or voice mails. For example, SMS's are considered new means of communication which the theory did not categorize due to their relatively recent introduction. Though SMS's would be categorized as lean media by MRT, yet, they are widely used, as by sending SMS's you can reach anyone, anywhere and at anytime with relatively low prices. Accordingly, a communication medium such as

SMS would have necessarily replaced other older forms of communication such as voice mail.

Accordingly, MRT is a valid and applicable theory. Based on what has been discussed above, the results imply that almost in all equivocal tasks and situations, employees prefer rich communication media to reduce uncertainty, decrease any potential miscommunication, and make the task clearer and more understandable, and assist in reaching organizational effectiveness. Consequently, this goes in positive direction with the predictions of MRT.

Second, this research failed to find support for the hypothesis which stated that high-context collectivistic cultures prefer rich media in all communication tasks within their organizations more than low-context individualistic cultures. There were not any significant or measurable differences between HCC cultures and LCI ones. The preferences for communication media was the same in both cultures across the different equivocal situations, unlike the assumption made by the hypothesis. Generally speaking, employees in both cultures ranked their media preference the same way; face-to-face being the most preferable, followed by telephones, and e-mails. In other words, both cultures selected face-to-face, the richest medium, to be the most preferable. Hence, LCI cultures had a similar preference for rich media like HCC ones. Additionally, employees in both cultures agreed that the 'availability of visual cues' is the most important factor influencing their media choice, followed by the 'nature of the task' (simple or complex) and finally, the 'importance of the task-at-hand'. Moreover, both cultures agreed that the use of rich media reduces uncertainty and equivocality.

The only noticeable and significant difference found between both cultures was when employees were directly asked if they preferred to use rich or lean media most of the time. Only in this question that both cultures differed where the difference in preference for rich media was much higher in HCC cultures. However, such a finding would not affect the lack of difference between both cultures, because as it is clear from the earlier findings, all different situations, scenarios, and tasks proved there were no significant differences between both cultures.

When handling routine tasks, both cultures alike preferred e-mail and telephone communication, whereas when handling non-routine ones, both cultures were similar in their preference for face-to-face communication. Accordingly, the assumption of the hypothesis that HCC cultures will prefer rich media is not supported.

In six given scenarios; three high in equivocality and three low, both cultures showed similar preferences where face-to-face was selected as the most suitable medium for complicated scenarios and e-mail was selected for simple ones. For the three scenarios which are high in equivocality, the average percentage for HCC cultures' preference for rich media combined (face-to-face, telephone, and video conferencing) was very close to that of LCI cultures. For the three simple tasks and since the preference for rich media is the tested aspect, the average percentage for HCC cultures' preference for rich media combined was calculated and was also found to be very close to that of LCI cultures. Based on such results, we can again deduce that rich media was not more preferable by HCC cultures. In other words, the preference for rich media by both cultures is the same across the communication tasks.

Based on all the results concluded above, it is clear that, in spite of the slight difference between both cultures, yet the difference did not prove significant. Consequently, such findings can lead us to assume that besides failing to support the research hypothesis, we can also deduce that Hofstede's and Hall's frameworks are not sustained. Their assumptions about HCC cultural preferences in regards to their preference for rich communication and LCI in regards to their preference for lean one did not find sufficient or measurable support. However, it seems likely that the lack of support for their cultural frameworks lends more support to MRT. To make it clearer, such finding pertaining to the lack of differences between cultures leads to stronger support for MRT, because had this research found cultural difference, then consequently, the assumptions made by MRT would have been valid for one culture and not valid for the other. In other words, Hofstede and Hall might be on opposite sides of MRT as they predicted differences between cultures, whereas MRT did not make such a distinction but rather gave general assumptions pertaining to all cultures.

Therefore, it seems only logical and safe to conclude that individuals of all cultures have similar preferences when selecting a communication medium within their organization. Regardless of the criteria upon which individuals choose the communication media, it seems likely that all individuals, from HCC cultures and LCI ones alike, have similar media preferences whether in simple or complicated tasks. In view of that, we can conclude that based on such findings, Hofstede's and Hall's frameworks may not be suitable enough to be used as references for assessing cultural differences pertaining to organizational communication.

6.3. Limitations of the Study

This study is not without limitations. First, the sample is not fully representative as the population is relatively small in size. Additionally, this study selected only companies specialized in IT/Aviation to test MRT. Accordingly, this selection could limit the generalization of the results, whether for the results pertaining to the theory and its support, or the different cultural media preference. Furthermore, this study could have possibly tested the "company" culture rather than the country culture. Accordingly, other companies might have different preferences.

Furthermore, this research did not study or focus on a particular age group, but rather included employees of all ages. Consequently, there might be different media preferences pertaining to one age group or the other. In other words, employees of a younger age might prefer and be enthusiastic about newer forms of communication media than their elder counterparts, whereas employees who are older in age might be reluctant to use newer forms of media or lack the expertise.

Moreover, this research did not focus or select employees based on their positions or hierarchy within the organization. Accordingly, different roles and job descriptions within an organization might entail or bias employees towards one communication medium or the other. Consequently, all the above factors might bias the results and lead to the lack of generalization.

6.4. Conclusion and Recommendations for Further Studies

This study lends further support to MRT and adds weight to the evidence which support the theory. As per the predictions made by the theory, rich media, particularly face-to-face, is widely preferred for complicated and ambiguous tasks by employees in HCC cultures and LCI ones alike. Additionally, e-mail was also the medium of choice in simple, routine tasks for employees in both cultures as well. On one hand, the study found the telephones are, to a great extent, widely used by employees in both cultures and for simple and complicated tasks alike. On the other hand, the study failed to find well-founded explanation for the employees' low preference for memos, video conference, and voice mail in all the different tasks. Finally, this study, though found very few and minor differences between HCC cultures and LCI ones, yet those differences were not major or significant.

It is recommended to replicate this study in different companies which are specialized in different fields aside from IT/Aviation in order to be able to generalize the results and test whether employees specialized in different fields will have similar media preferences or not. It is also recommended to replicate this study with larger samples from HCC cultures and LCI ones to confirm the findings and verify that there are not any cultural differences regarding the media preference. Moreover, future research should try to find explicable reasons for the low preference for memos, voice mail, and voice conference by employees, as well as attempt to clarify where these media stand in relation to the predictions made by MRT. Additionally, it would be beneficial to examine the use and perceptions of SMS's in accordance with MRT and explore its usage in

different communication tasks. Finally, future researches should attempt to conduct some in-depth interviews with employees from different cultures to widen the scope of the study and further understand and analyze the media choices made by employees of HCC cultures in comparison to others in LCI ones.

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APPENDIX 1: Survey Sample

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1. Section A

My name is Mai Abdel Kader. I am a graduate student at the American University in Cairo. I am looking forward to your participation in this survey, which is required for my thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for my Journalism & Mass Communication Masters Degree. My research aims to compare the communication media used within organizations and how they differ from one culture to the other.

Completing this survey will require 7 – 10 minutes. Participation is voluntary and is not mandatory by any employee. All responses will remain anonymous. If you would like a copy of the survey summary results, please e-mail me at: mai2000@aucegypt.edu. Thanks.

1. Age:

- ◯ 20 – 30
- ◯ 31 – 40
- ◯ 41 & above

2. Gender:

- ◯ Male
- ◯ Female

*** 3. Country of residence:**

- ◯ Egypt, UAE, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Tunisia, Bahrain
- ◯ Canada, USA, UK, Germany, France, Czech Republic, Switzerland
- ◯ Other

Please specify:

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2. Section B

*** 4. Do you deal with multinational cultures within your organization?**

- ◯ Always
- ◯ Sometimes
- ◯ Never

*** 5. It is important to match the communication medium to the task I am handling:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

*** 6. As an employee, how would you rate the following communication media while communicating with your colleagues and managers?**

	Extremely Preferable	Preferable	Neutral	Not Preferable	Extremely Unpreferable
Face-to-face	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Video Conferencing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Telephone	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Voice mail	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E-mail	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Memo	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

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*** 7. Please rate the importance of the below factors when choosing a communication medium within your organization:**

	Extremely Important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Extremely Unimportant
Availability of visual cues (such as immediate feedback, gestures...etc)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My expertise and/or the expertise of the person I am contacting with that medium	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Physical location of the person I am contacting	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Time zone differences	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The importance of the task-at-hand	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The nature of the task (simple or complex)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
The position/title of the person I am contacting	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
My relationship with the person I am contacting	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

*** 8. Visual cues (such as immediate feedback, gestures...etc) make a complicated task (such as discussing confusing details about the employees' salaries) more understandable:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

*** 9. When working on a complicated task, it is better to use a medium that contains visual cues:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

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*** 10. Because face-to-face communication is a rich medium (provides instant feedback, visual cues...), it is more suitable than e-mails for complicated tasks:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

*** 11. Because e-mail is a lean medium (does NOT include instant feedback or visual cues...), it is more suitable than face-to-face for simple tasks:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

*** 12. The uncertainty (lack of information) and equivocality (lack of shared understanding) involved in any task will be reduced by matching the task to the suitable communication medium:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

*** 13. Using a rich communication medium (as face-to-face or telephone) will reduce the uncertainty and equivocality involved in any task:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

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3.

*** 14. Choosing an unsuitable communication medium will lead to misunderstandings within the organization members:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

*** 15. Please rate the importance of the below factors while communicating with someone within your organizations:**

Visual Cues	
Establishing a rapport (a relation of mutual trust)	
Going straight to the point	
Building relationships	
Expressing feelings and emotions	

*** 16. For a simple / routine task, such as providing someone with a customer's contact details, please specify your media usage preference:**

Face-to-face	
Video Conferencing	
Telephone	
Voice mail	
E-mail	
Memo	

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*** 17. For a complicated / non-routine task, such as explaining to your manager the progress of a project, please specify your media usage preference:**

Face-to-face	
Video Conferencing	
Telephone	
Voice mail	
E-mail	
Memo	

*** 18. Please choose the most suitable medium in each of the below situations. When you...**

	Face-to-Face	Telephone	Video Conferencing	Voice mail	E-mail	Memo
Need to discuss some changes about your benefit package	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Need to explain a complicated matter to your manager	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Need to resolve a conflict within your department	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Need to inform someone about an upcoming meeting	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Need to send someone a customer's contact details	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Need to update your manager about last year's sales achievements	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

*** 19. Different cultures have different preferences for media usage:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

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*** 20. When communicating within my organization with someone from a different culture, changing the medium I usually use will lead to better communication outcomes:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree

*** 21. Generally speaking, most of the time I prefer using:**

- ◯ Rich Media (face-to-face, telephone)
- ◯ Lean Media (E-mail, memo)

Please give reasons for your choice:

*** 22. Please rank your media preference while communicating with someone from Europe or North America:**
(Please check N/A if you are a resident of Europe or North America)

	Highly Prefereable	Preferable	Neutral	Unpreferable	Highly Unprefereable	N/A
Face-to-face	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Video Conferencing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Telephone	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Voice mail	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E-mails	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Memo	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

*** 23. Please rank your media preference while communicating with someone from the Middle East or Africa:**
(Please check N/A if you are a resident of Middle East or Africa)

	Extremely Preferable	Preferable	Neutral	Not Preferable	Extremely Unpreferable	N/A
Face-to-face	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Video Conferencing	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Telephone	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Voice mail	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
E-mails	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
Memo	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

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*** 24. Overall, choosing a suitable communication medium will contribute to the organizational effectiveness:**

- ◯ Strongly Agree
- ◯ Agree
- ◯ Neutral
- ◯ Disagree
- ◯ Strongly Disagree