

Examining Business Communication by Mobilising Actor-Network Theory

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Abstract

An international business network (IBN) is a dynamic ecosystem that consists of heterogeneous actors. In this study, IBN involves international investment and cross-border trade. Although communication is often posited as a pivotal element in accelerating business arrangements, few studies examine the communication dynamics within IBN from a communication perspective. Therefore, this study aims to provide a novel communication model that can reveal matters of concern vis-à-vis business communication. Actor-network theory (ANT) provides a framework for examining communication translation among actors involved in the IBN. By mobilising ANT as the methodological driver, this study follows actors who influence the network through semi-structured interviews (N=55). Participants include investors, investees, merchants, buyers, and government agencies. Data are analysed using thematic analysis. The results reveal eight business communication models that can shape and influence the IBN: relationality, topicality, modularity, temporality, purposiveness, output-orientation, spatiality, and transparency. Relationality refers to the degree of business and meaningful relationships. Topicality refers to the subject of conversation. Modularity refers to the preference of communication conduits. Temporality refers to the degree of continuity embedded in the message. Purposiveness refers to the degree of time priority. Output-orientation refers to the degree of competition of ideas and interests. Spatiality refers to the distance between actors, both geographically and emotionally. Transparency refers to the degree of information visibility. These models interweave, and each has its own spectrum. Overall, this study advances communication studies by offering a novel business communication model that conceptualises business communication as a dynamic and multidimensional process.

Keywords: Actor-Network Theory, Business Communication, Investment, Negotiation, Trade