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ANALYZING EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN THE WORKPLACE

АНАЛІЗ ПОГЛЯДІВ ПРАЦІВНИКІВ НА ВИКОРИСТАННЯ СОЦІАЛЬНИХ МЕРЕЖ НА РОБОЧОМУ МІСЦІ

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Пінто С.К., Аморім М.З. Аналіз поглядів працівників на використання соціальних мереж на робочому місці. Оглядова стаття.

У цьому дослідженні вивчається еволюція ролі інформаційних технологій (IT) на робочому місці в умовах Індустрії 4.0 та пандемії COVID-19. Воно зосереджене на ставленні португальських працівників до використання соціальних мереж на роботі та їхньому впливі на організаційну ефективність. Використовуючи кількісний підхід, дослідження збирає дані від португальських фахівців через цифрові платформи, такі як Facebook та LinkedIn. Результати свідчать про інтенсивне використання соціальних мереж у бізнесі, особливо для маркетингу та залучення клієнтів. Хоча працівники визнають їхні переваги, вони занепокоєні питаннями залежності та безпеки даних. Дослідження підкреслює вирішальну роль соціальних мереж у забезпеченні безперервності бізнесу та конкурентоспроможності, закликаючи до їх стратегічного використання для корпоративного зростання. Воно пропонує цінну інформацію про динаміку соціальних мереж на робочому місці, закладаючи основу для майбутніх досліджень щодо оптимізації цифрових інструментів для підвищення ефективності роботи організації.

Ключові слова: соціальні мережі, сприйняття працівників, робоче середовище, COVID-19

Pinto S.C., Amorim M.Z. Analyzing Employee Perspectives on Social Media Use in the Workplace. Review article.

This study explores the evolving role of Information Technology (IT) in the workplace amid Industry 4.0 and the COVID-19 pandemic. It focuses on Portuguese employees' attitudes toward social media usage at work and its impact on organizational effectiveness. Using a quantitative approach, the research collects data from Portuguese professionals via digital platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn. Findings indicate an intensified use of social media in business, particularly for marketing and customer engagement. While employees acknowledge its benefits, concerns include dependency and data security issues. The study underscores social media's critical role in business continuity and competitiveness, advocating strategic use for corporate growth. It offers valuable insights into workplace social media dynamics, laying groundwork for future research on digital tool optimization for organizational performance.

Keywords: social networks, employee perception, work environment, COVID-19

The present society is marked by a transitional phase and digital transformation, which is commonly known as the fourth industrial revolution or industry 4.0 (Lu, 2017). This society is witnessing the emergence of innovative technologies under the umbrella of information technology (IT), including the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), cyber-physical environments, robotics, sensors, 3D printing, big data, augmented reality, and cloud computing.

This unpredictable, dynamic, and unforeseen phenomenon, as stated by Mack et al. (2016), has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has jeopardised organisations' competitiveness (Guo et al. 2020). Internet access has played a pivotal role in supporting companies. The pandemic has increased interactivity in companies, especially in teleworking, and has led to an uptick in digitisation, investments in technological mechanisms, and encouraged the use of social networks (Guo et al., 2020).

As a result, the use of Information Technology (IT) has become prevalent. Companies have information systems not only to connect different departments and employees but also for communicating with the outside world. Nowadays, companies compete with one another through online shops.

The growth and rise of digital platforms are remarkable. In under a decade, they've created jobs and nearly 10,000 platforms. Nowadays, there's an application for almost everything, ranging from straightforward activities like delivering clothes to complex ones like legal services. Fresh platforms are continually being developed. Companies regularly switch their platforms, and these changes vary from country to country. This is because there can never be too many updates (Moreira, 2019).

It is apparent that the survival of today's companies is substantially reliant on the internet and social media. With their ability to contribute to companies' growth

and longevity in areas like turnover, geographical scope, and customer base, internet and social media are irreplaceable.

The objective of this study is to ascertain the employees' viewpoints on the use of social networks in the workplace. Thus, we sought to uncover their perspectives and gauge the significance they assign to social networks in their workplace.

Several factors elucidate the significance of this research. Firstly, despite studies exploring the usefulness of social networks, research in this field is both rare and recent in Portugal. Secondly, most studies analyse the company's perspective rather than that of the employee. Thirdly, the analysed sample has distinctive features that differentiate it from samples in other studies, owing to the broader use of new technologies, such as social media, in other countries, relative to Portugal. Fourthly, in addition to its relevance, the topic is of paramount importance for companies that are increasingly focussed on promoting and growing their services or products, especially after the COVID-19 lockdown. The topic is noteworthy due to the potential of social networks for expanding the company's market share and/or geographical reach.

The research method employed is a quantitative study with a descriptive design, utilizing a survey that was distributed on digital platforms. The sample of respondents for the study comprises Portuguese individuals who have a professional occupation.

Analysis of recent research and publications

The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) is becoming progressively popular. This change has led to a significant revolution among companies, individuals, and society.

Several studies conducted in Portugal have evaluated digital media usage in various age groups, with particular attention to the elderly. Although older individuals may have lower educational qualifications, their usage of these technologies is not limited by this factor. Presently, it is evident how frequently they utilise mobile devices, social media platforms, selfies, applications, and videos (Azevedo 2016).

In enterprises, all managers, not just IT managers, bear the responsibility of making astute investments and effectively utilising these information technologies for their organizations' betterment (Brown et al. 2005).

To achieve success, it is crucial for a company to possess and effectively utilise Information Systems (IS), both internally and externally, for stakeholder communication. Internal communication involves creating a network that links all departments and employees such as production, warehousing, marketing, accounting and administration. External communication channels such as online shops and customer service are used by companies to compete with each other on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, website etc. (Brown et al. 2005; Pereira and Sá 2016).

Social media proves advantageous for both consumers and companies. It provides companies with an opportunity to interact with existing or prospective customers in a personalised manner and at the right

time. Consumers can use it as a source for fellow consumers' opinions about particular products or businesses (Zhang et al. 2018).

Moreover, social networks provide companies with a useful tool to identify, select, and verify the professional background of their employees as well (Melanthiou et al. 2015).

Contemporary society is witnessing a continuous stream of innovations and the creation of platforms is increasing incessantly. Well-established companies and/or platforms now reinvent themselves every day, or alter their applications from one country to another, as updating continuously can never be overstated (Moreira 2019).

Social media, therefore, fosters bonds and engagements among people, who circulate information, ideas, and influences through virtual communities. These groups of people exhibit aspects that differentiate them from conventional groups, which were limited by geographic or temporal proximity only (Tiago and Veríssimo 2014). Today, people can pick online communities that they want to become a member of and leverage their influence on other cybernauts within that group (Marques 2016).

Social networks allow individuals to interact through a platform that includes user profiles, photos, groups, emails, blogs or music, bringing together various members in a virtual environment (Tiago and Veríssimo 2014). By sharing information, social networks facilitate knowledge dissemination, encourage innovation, and provide opportunities for knowledge sharing. In this sense, they aid interactions between individuals and companies, brands, and applications. This is how companies and/or marketers aim to foster a closer relationship and a sense of commitment among their group members. Thus, organisations begin to communicate virally, targeting a large number of internet users (Fernandes and Belo 2016; Ponte 2000).

The internet is a form of 'word of mouth', or WOM Marketing. It involves interactions on social networks and impacts customers' decisions about a particular company or brand. Due to the fact that people group together in clusters that share common interests, this effect can have a more significant influence on purchasing decisions than channels used by companies through conventional methods. The potential of WOM Marketing and the permanent interactivity provided by mobile access enables a new communication channel that appears to be more reliable and credible. This is because messages are sent by independent people, and not by the companies (Goel et al. 2019; Tomšič and Snoj 2014).

Social networks, such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Myspace, act in a viral manner. They contribute to the awareness of companies and/or brands and stimulate customer loyalty. This makes customers closer and more involved with the company or brand, offering feedback for product innovation (Tiago and Veríssimo 2014).

Possible forms of comments include: commenting can be done on shared content (such as Flickr and YouTube), or on white-label platforms that enable the

creation and joining of communities to fit your preferences (such as People Aggregator and Ning), or using multi-user virtual environments where interactions between virtual characters (or avatars) are possible, or on platforms such as Second Life and World of Warcraft that don't involve data sharing or contact lists. Additional forms of commenting include Social Mobile platforms that offer similar features to normal social media platforms on mobile devices (like MYUBO), Microblogging platforms that are more dynamic and participatory and allow users to post messages of up to 140 characters (such as Twitter and Jaiku), and Social Search engines that focus on searching social media user profiles (Reis 2013).

The main part

This study aims to identify how employees perceive social network usage in the workplace. To achieve this objective, the following research questions have been defined:

[PI₁]: To what extent has the working environment changed during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

[PI₂]: Were workers aware of teleworking support technologies before the COVID-19 pandemic?

[PI₃]: What changes have companies experienced due to the pandemic?

[PI₄]: During the pandemic, which social networks have companies increased their usage for marketing?

[PI₅]: What are the benefits and drawbacks of using social media for companies?

[PI₆]: What are the goals that companies aim to fulfil by using social media?

The developed analysis aims to address the research questions via a survey based on surveys by

Couto (2015), Lima (2021), and Ferreira (2020), alongside a literature review. Besides examining the respondents' profile, the survey incorporates structured queries to address the identified issues. The survey was assembled using Google Forms, and the survey participants comprise Portuguese professionals engaged in some form of occupational activity. Data was gathered solely via an online survey that was published only on social media platforms Facebook and LinkedIn within the timeframe of three months, running from 1st January 2021 to 31st March 2021. As a result, there were 152 participants in the survey. In some questions, the respondents showed their level of importance concerning specific prepositions by employing the Likert scale. The Likert scale ranges from one to five with five indicating a complete agreement, while three suggests neutrality, and one considers total disagreement. The respondents, on average, agree with those prepositions that have an average value of over two and a half. In contrast, they disagree with those that have an average value of less than two and a half.

Statistical data processing and hypothesis testing were performed using EViews 9. The statistical significance of variables was assessed using student's t-tests at a 5% level of statistical significance, with a 95% confidence interval set.

A descriptive socio-demographic analysis was conducted to familiarise with the sample. Table 1 presents the characterisation of the 152 sample respondents among whom 92 (60.5%) were female and 60 (39.5%) male.

Table 1. Characterisation of the sample

Category	Scale	N	%	Category	Scale	N	%
Gender	Male	60	39,5%	Academic Qualifications	Basic	12	7,9%
	Female	92	60,5%		Secondary	24	15,8%
	Total Sample	152			Superior/Higher	116	76,3%
Marital Status	Single	80	52,6%	Age	< 18 years old	0	0%
	Married/Unmarried	68	44,8%		[19 - 25 years old]	55	36,2%
	Divorced/Separated	4	2,6%		[26 - 35 years old]	43	28,3%
	Widowed	0	0%		[36 - 50 years old]	43	28,3%
					> 50 years old	11	7,2%

Source: the authors' own elaboration

The age group with the most significant number of participants comprises those aged between 19 and 25, with 55 respondents (36.2%). This group is trailed by two other age groups, 26 to 35 and 36 to 50, both with 43 respondents (28.3%) each. The age group under 18 has received no responses. This group is covered by compulsory education and hence does not fulfil a vital requirement of the sample – involvement in a professional activity. Out of the participants, 80 individuals (52.6%) are unmarried, while 68 (44.8%) are either married or in a civil partnership. 76.3% of the

respondents, which amounts to 116 individuals, have received higher education, whereas only 7.9% (12 individuals) possess basic education.

The companies' activity fields, where the respondents work, are: Sector participants are from the Industry/Production, Trade/Transport/Distribution, Education, Consultancy, Telecommunications/Informatics, Health, Banking/Insurance, Public Administration, Construction amongst others, constituting 33%, 12%, 10%, 8%, 8%, 6%, 6%, 4%,

3%, and 10%, correspondingly. Figure 1 illustrates the respondents' professional area.

According to Figure 1, the technical area of the company (25.7%) is the most representative group in the sample. The commercial, financial, administrative and marketing areas have figures close to 11%-12%.

The participants work in companies of varying sizes. Out of the total respondents, 66 (43.4%) work in large companies (more than 250 employees), whilst 31 (20.4%) work in micro-companies (less than 10 employees). The remaining 28 and 27 (18.4% and 17.8% respectively) work in small companies (11 to 50 employees) and medium-sized companies (51 to 250 employees).

Analysis and Discussion of Results.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown, numerous companies have needed to alter their processes and restructure their teams to ensure that they are still functional. Innovative remote technologies, like Zoom and Teams, have played an important role in restructuring companies, by providing mechanisms for their employees to carry on working (Brown et al., 2005). The lack of these technologies might result in the closure of many businesses, with potentially negative implications for companies, the economy, and society, including a decrease in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment, income, and consumption. As a result, the population's well-being would potentially be diminished.

Prior to the pandemic, only 11.2 percent (17 respondents) reported that the company they worked for had provisions for teleworking. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the way they work changed, with 62.5 percent (97 respondents) working remotely during the pandemic.

Figure 2 illustrates some factors that respondents believe the company should have implemented or changed during the pandemic. The most notable factors are the working methods used, with 80.1 percent of respondents identifying them, followed by the technology used, identified by 45.4 percent of respondents.

Organisations have undergone changes during the pandemic and have been forced to restructure their activities. The pandemic has not only caused companies to restructure but also affected consumers who have suffered from these changes and have had to adapt to the new conditions. Due to the lockdown, the ways in which consumers buy goods/services have been constrained, which has consequently changed the ways in which companies can sell them (Nogueira, 2022).

Companies had to restructure the commercial area, requiring a modification in sales techniques. The pandemic-induced social isolation has compelled companies to advertise their services or goods online to stay viable. In the sample, 70.4% of the respondents (107) reported that the company they work for has employed social media as a means of business development. According to Figure 3, the social networks most frequently utilised by companies for promoting their services/goods are Facebook (72.9%)

followed by LinkedIn (60%), whereas Twitter (2.8%) is the least used network.

The analysis makes it clear that businesses make use of social networks. It is thus crucial to evaluate the viewpoint of respondents/employees about the merits and demerits of these digital platforms represented in Figures 4 and 5, correspondingly.

According to Figure 4, the most significant benefits for companies using social networks are interaction with the public (63.6%), effective communication with customers (58.9%), and greater access to information (51.4%). According to respondents, competitive prices (3.7%) and low fixed costs (13.1%) are the two least identified factors as advantages for companies when using social media. On the other hand, the greatest drawbacks (Figure 5) of using social networks are dependence on the internet (40.2%), high competition in certain areas of activity (40.2%), and excessive advertising (35.5%). The least agreed-upon drawbacks for companies when using social networks are the requirement for knowledge (14%) and excessive information (24.3%).

Considering the above mentioned, it is apparent that the existence of companies heavily relies on the internet and social networks in this era. In current times, social networks are vital for businesses by promoting growth in turnover, customer base, and geographic presence, ultimately ensuring their survival.

To determine the objectives of the companies that employ social networks, six statements are provided for rating on a scale of one to five, with one being strongly disagree, three being in the middle, and five being strongly agree. Statements with average values greater than 2.5 denote that respondent concur, while values lower than 2.5 indicate disagreement on average.

Social media enables companies to achieve several objectives such as enhancing brand awareness, easing marketing efforts, and enhancing revenue. Conversely, the least sought-after goals by companies when it comes to social media are boosting customer numbers, fostering commercial relationships and expanding operational areas.

However, for companies to benefit from social media usage, consumers must be acquainted with these platforms. The majority of surveyed respondents (85.3%) reported having no issue with using these digital tools, whilst 67.4% claim that they have discovered new digital platforms during the pandemic and remote work. In conclusion, it can be stated that the pandemic has drawn the population closer to these platforms as apps have facilitated communication.

It is widely known that a company can be established as long as it fulfills the requisite employment standards. Nevertheless, participants were asked whether connecting to a business or company online through social networks assists in its growth and development. The findings are illuminating: 64.5% of respondents claim that it is impossible to establish a company without a social network presence.

In conclusion, the pandemic period has altered the paradigm of companies, as well as the business plans

and strategies that were previously envisaged. Although the business structure has undergone readaptation and reorganization, firms have been able to adjust, predominantly through the application of technology. Companies are also advocates of social networks and the role they play in promoting business growth.

Conclusion

This research aims to determine, from the viewpoint of employees and/or consumers, the pros and cons of companies using social networks. To accomplish this objective, a survey of 152 respondents was analyzed, with participants sampled from the Facebook and LinkedIn digital platforms.

Several factors justify the relevance of this study. Firstly, given that few studies have analyzed the usefulness of social networks in Portugal, it is evident that research in this area is both limited and recent. Secondly, most studies focus on the company's perspective rather than the employee's view. Thirdly, the analysed sample exhibits distinguishing characteristics compared to samples in previous studies. Other countries have a wider adoption of new technologies compared to Portugal. Furthermore, the topic is critical for firms that increasingly focus on promoting or expanding their services/products, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown, in addition to being a current topic of interest. The significance of the topic lies in the potential for social networks to facilitate an increase in the company's market share and/or market.

Most of the sample analysed consists of female respondents, with the most representative age group being 18 to 25 years old. Moreover, the majority of respondents have higher education.

Considering the research questions, the following conclusions have been drawn:

(1) The pandemic has changed the way we view work and organisations. During the lockdown, a majority of the respondents (62.5 percent) worked remotely.

(2) Companies have restructured their commercial area, including changes in sales techniques. Due to society's isolation during the pandemic, companies have had to restructure their commercial area. Companies have started or intensified their online promotion of services and goods. Facebook (72.9%)

and LinkedIn (60%) are the most popular social networks.

(3) Using social networks provides companies with both advantages and disadvantages. The main advantages are that social networks facilitate interaction with the public (63.6%), provide a fast and effective way of communicating with customers (58.9%), and allow broad access to information (51.4%). However, the three main disadvantages are creating dependence on the internet (40.2%), facing too much competition in certain sectors (40.2%) and excessive advertising (35.5%).

(4) Companies can accomplish various objectives by using social media, including promoting their brand, increasing their visibility, and enhancing their financial performance. However, companies are less interested in leveraging social media to develop commercial relationships, expand their geographic reach, or increase their customer base.

(5) A significant majority of the sample (64.5%) hold the perspective that having a social media presence is essential for setting up a company.

The advancement of technology and social networks has caused changes in society, including alterations in consumer behaviour, as well as in the ways businesses operate. To sustain or grow their business, companies are obliged to have a presence on social networks.

This study is limited by the questionnaire sample, which assesses behavioural aspects. Therefore, the accuracy of information gathered is dependent on the interviewees' honesty. Nevertheless, the interviewees were instructed to share their actual perceptions instead of socially desirable responses, underscoring the significance of this approach for ensuring research reliability. One more constraint of this study is the sample size, which is due to the population's poor engagement in responding to the questionnaire.

Both the results achieved and the limitations of this study raise further queries for potential research. The conducted analysis pertains to the viewpoint of the participants in the year 2021. For future research, it would be beneficial to replicate the study during a different time frame to verify the consistency of the results. Additionally, it would be intriguing to broaden the study's scope by incorporating a larger sample and promoting the research across multiple countries.

Abstract

This study delves into the evolving role of Information Technology (IT) in the workplace, against the backdrop of Industry 4.0 and further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The introduction highlights the significant shift towards digital transformation, emphasizing the incorporation of technologies like the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and social media into everyday business operations. The objective of the research is to analyze Portuguese employees' attitudes towards social media usage in the workplace and to assess its perceived impact on organizational effectiveness and communication.

Utilizing a quantitative methodology, this paper employs a descriptive survey design to collect data from a sample of Portuguese professionals. The survey, distributed via digital platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn, explores various facets of social media usage within corporate settings during the pandemic.

The results reveal that the pandemic has notably intensified the use of social media in business contexts, primarily for marketing and customer engagement. Employees recognize the benefits of social media in enhancing interaction and information accessibility, yet they also express concerns over increased dependency and potential data security issues.

The conclusion underscores the critical nature of social media for business continuity and competitive advantage in the current digital era. It also suggests that while social media presents certain challenges, its strategic use is essential for fostering corporate growth and adaptability. This study contributes valuable insights into the dynamics of social media use in the workplace, providing a basis for future research on optimizing digital tools for enhanced organizational performance.

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