

Factors affecting Employee Advocacy through Social Media

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Abstract

Employee advocacy is an imperative component of any organization's success. It's organization's promotion through its employees by using their social contacts and networking. Social media is a present-day notion and is proving to be very suitable for employee advocacy, as they can use their networks on social networking sites to endorse the organization they are working for. This Paper aims to study factors that impact employee advocacy through social media. The scholarly research on factors influencing advocacy by employees is uncovered in this study from the employee word of mouth, endorsement, employee sharing, and culture perspective. The Primary data for the study was gathered using a structured questionnaire in Google form from the employees in the IT sector in Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Mohali. Factor Analysis has been applied to study the proposed objective. Employee word of mouth, endorsement, employee sharing, and culture were extracted as the four factors that impact employee advocacy through social media.

Key Words

Social Media, Employee Advocacy, Employee Word of Mouth, Endorsement, Employee Sharing and Culture.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the world is technology driven and social media has turned out to be a part of our routine life activities. We are using many networks and applications for sharing and communicating matters with others. When our networks increase, our personal and public information also increases with the

extensive audience. (Pridmore, 2015)

The revolution of the marketing environment has been made possible by new digital technologies. Digital marketing has replaced traditional marketing and one of the most important marketing tactics in the current digital era is social media marketing.

The simplest channel for businesses to reach their clients is social networking. It enables two-way contact between the parties and has greatly enhanced consumer participation and advocacy. Businesses can create communities that promote their brands and lead to greater levels of client loyalty.

Even while today's businesses regard client loyalty above all else, many of them have failed to recognise the marketing potential that resides inside their workforce — employees may be a huge marketing asset (Latvala, 2017).

On one hand, organizations are using social media to promote various job activities, and on the other hand, they are using social media to advertise and promote their goods and services sales.

Employees are treasured organizational advocates, because they relate with customers, are reliable sources of information and have a comprehensive familiarity with organizations (Dortok, 2006; Shinnar, Young, and Meana, 2004). In this framework, advocacy is a person's dynamic promotion of an association through such behaviors as constructive word-of-mouth and protection in contradiction of detracts (Men, 2014).

Undoubtedly, employees of a company are its most valuable assets. When the employees are happy and productive it will lead to their growth, retention, and a healthy culture. But, today many organizations are not able to optimally utilize the potential of their employees (Levinson, 2018).

Today, the world is digitized, and social media is part of our daily lives. This makes employee advocacy essential thing for all the organizations. The paper focuses on the concept of employee advocacy through social media and explores the factors to be considered for its successful implementation.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social media can be considered an exciting, new style of marketing that necessitates a new tactical method to connect with shoppers (Smith and Zook, 2011). Some studies say social media to be a fusion component in the promotion mix which also involves traditional communication between the business and the customers and the conversations amongst the customers which is beyond the direct control of the organization (Mangold and Faulds, 2009).

“Social media cannot only be considered as a new marketing device, nevertheless, it is a novel way of doing everything in a corporation. It wants an overall new value for the organization, which needs overall support at all levels, systems, and motivations. Also, an innovative outlook is needed: more hearing, less noise.”

— Smith and Zook, 2011

Employee advocates are the determined professionals in their arena who contribute to deliberations with knowledgeable understanding. Social media is a brisk and well-organized communication channel for personnel to hook up with others (Kettunen, 2018).

Workforces can grasp more public than their company's corporate social media pages together and the scope rises apparently by the span of employees' companies have. Employees also possibly have accounts in various social media networks that the employer is not working on and this may add new onlookers. (Smarp 2017.)

(Edelman Trust Barometer, 2016) studied that the section of individuals who trust data from their networks and private sources on social networking webpages was 78 percent. Conversely, the section who trusted data imminent from the CEO of a corporation was only 49 percent. And 55 percent of the folks believe in the information received from employees on social media. Employees as a source of information are perceived to be more reliable than the employers.

The ads posted by the company or the marketing departments are usually blocked by ad blockers. And the posts that employees put in their social media accounts are individual posts thus are not blocked by the ad blockers. Moreover, the ads posted by the individual employee are more impactful than the company's ads through their official pages (Smarp 2017). These ads do not even require any financial investment thus are cost-effective and improve sales too.

Personnel who post about their employers through their social networks enhance their professional image and personal brand. It also increases their professional links as the work-related posts very often involve and improve the number of their allies (Sundberg and Donkor, 2017). Particularly young employees consider that their professional engrossment in social media networking can distinguish them from other users (Hinge Research Institute and Social Media Today, 2016).

Although, there is less risk for an organization, employee advocacy offers advantages similar to those of customer brand advocacy. Employees are more driven to advance the brand's success than any external champion and

they are also more familiar with the brand. Additionally, they are aware of the brand's vision and objective, are familiar with the rules and in general desire to contribute to its success. Customers won't be enthusiastic about an organization's activities if its personnel aren't engaged in them (Parkkisenniemi, 2016).

Employee advocacy denotes that employees are ready to share the company's principles and disseminations with their private social webs. Employee advocacy can occur via word-of-mouth, but presently the whole experience has been reformed by social media. Since it enables a much broader spread of networks (Kuutsa, 2016). Hence, this research emphasizes the more current trend of employee advocacy instigated through social media.

RESEARCH GAP AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Social media, if used in a guided way by the employees can help organizations to achieve their objectives effectively. Employee advocacy is a great method to make your brand stand out when technology comes into play. Companies can leverage the social networks of employees to create a positive buzz for their brand. When the employees tell their experiences by posting them on their social media accounts, they can bring more confidence among their followers. In the era of social media, companies can use their employees as their brand ambassadors if the employees are ready to advocate for their company, its products, or services. However, little research has been done to find if the employees are ready to use their social media accounts to advocate for their company. The main objective of the present study is to investigate into the factors affecting employee advocacy through social media. The study is significant as it aims to fill the gap in the literature regarding employees being advocates for the firm's products and services through social media. A little research has been done to find the factors that affect employee advocacy in organizations in today's digital era. This research will add to the body of knowledge of the existing literature on the use of social media, employee advocacy, and the factors that influence employee advocacy through social media. Lastly, very little research has been done in India in this context. Lastly, the Indian IT sector which too is witnessing the use of social media for promotions and advocacy by the employees for their employers has not been researched much in this context. Since the topic is so recent and no prior research has been conducted from this angle, this study exposes employee advocacy to professionals who are not already familiar with the phenomena or its advantages. This study emphasizes the value of employees and urges

businesses to utilize their potential as marketers by providing organizations with pertinent information and solutions for implementing employee advocacy. This piece of research will be a modest attempt to cover all these research gaps.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To examine the factors that influence employee advocacy through social media.

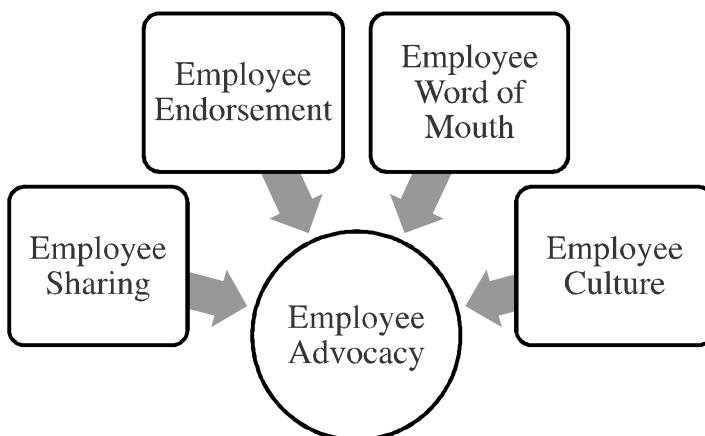
SCALE FOR MEASURING EMPLOYEE ADVOCACY

The statements of the scale were adopted from (Carvellon and Lirio, 2017). According to (Carvellon and Lirio, 2017) top management likely expects employees to be engaged in all 14 items in social media for an organization. We used all the statements to measure employee advocacy in the current piece of research. The views of participants were received on a Likert scale ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. A total of fourteen statements were used to measure employee advocacy.

Framework of the Factors Affecting Employee Advocacy

Figure 1

Factors Affecting Employee Advocacy



Source : Figure Created by Authors

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study aims to ascertain the factors that impact employee advocacy through social media. It proposes to bring forward the factors that encourage people for advocating its employer's brand. Through a structured questionnaire

via Google form and offline visits, data was gathered from 600 employees of IT sector of Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Mohali. The population included the employees working in IT companies from the IT parks selected from the three areas i.e. Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Mohali. The number of employees is approximately 25000 in RGCTP Chandigarh (Department of Information Technology Chandigarh), 20000 in IT Park Panchkula, and approximately 20000 in Quark City and STPI, Mohali. Taking into consideration Godden's formula a total sample of 600 was taken.

The size of the sample for the study was decided using (Godden, 2004) formula

Sample size in case of infinite population (population more than 50,000)

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 \times (P) \times (1 - P)}{C^2}$$

SS = Sample Size

Z = Z value (1.96 for 95% Confidence level)

P = Percentage of population picking a choice, expressed as decimal

C = Confidence interval expressed as decimal (.4 = +/- 4% points)

$$SS = \frac{3.8416 \times .5 \times .5}{.0016}$$

$$SS = 600$$

The planned sample size was 600 according to Godden's formula. Approximately 1000 offline forms were sent to the potential respondents. Emails containing the online questionnaire link were also sent to the employees through Google form. The same was also sent through WhatsApp directly to some of the employees of the selected companies. A total of 619 (498 offline and 121 online) questionnaires were received back. 17 offline and 2 online questionnaires were unusable responses, resulting in the final sample of 600 (481 offline and 119 online). For the study, the researchers selected respondents who were among the following job profiles : Programmers, software developers, engineers, testers, and team and project leaders.

So, the above said employees were considered as sample in the study.

A Pilot study is an initial and small piece of study conducted before complete research to test the effectiveness of the research methodology. It is generally carried out on members of the related population. For this study, the pilot survey was conducted with 66 respondents. In this way, the tool was

Table 1
Communalities

Variables	Initial	Extr-action	Mean	Std. Deviation	Correc-ted Item - Total Cor-relation	Cronba-ch's Alpha if item Deleted
I speak positively about my employer's brand on social media. (EA1)	1.000	.523	4.9467	1.55602	.399	.814
I praise the achievements of my employer's brand on social media. (EA2)	1.000	.707	5.0600	1.49112	.474	.809
When I have criticism about my employer, I refrain from sharing it online. (EA3)	1.000	.531	4.5017	1.66371	.340	.819
I do not post comments about my employer online that I might regret later. (EA4)	1.000	.759	4.9333	1.61655	.493	.807
I am a fan/ follow my employer's brand on social media. (EA5)	1.000	.685	5.0333	1.56939	.558	.803
I recommend my employer brand products and services to my contacts on social media. (EA6)	1.000	.685	5.0517	1.50425	.513	.806
I recommend my company to potential job candidates. (EA7)	1.000	.698	4.9517	1.49546	.545	.804
I respond (constructively) when my contacts criticize my employer's brand products or services on social media. (EA8)	1.000	.658	4.9700	1.51644	.524	.805
I pass along information about my employer's brand on social media. (EA9)	1.000	.682	4.8683	1.62339	.409	.814
I "like" content posted by my employer. (EA10)	1.000	.778	5.0733	1.50279	.403	.814
I share links to/from the employer's brand on social media. (EA11)	1.000	.589	5.0317	1.60467	.441	.811
I keep in mind that I could harm my employer's brand when interacting on social media. (EA12)	1.000	.611	4.9817	1.59444	.337	.819
I behave on social media in a way that is consistent with my employer's brand values and culture. (EA13)	1.000	.771	4.8883	1.55667	.449	.811
I communicate on topics related to my employer's business in a way my employer would approve of. (EA14)	1.000	.576	4.6333	1.67438	.421	.813

Source : Table Created by Authors

Table 2
Pearson Correlation

	EA1	EA2	EA3	EA4	EA5	EA6	EA7	EA8	EA9	EA10	EA11	EA12	EA13	EA14
EA1	1.000	.476	.314	.529	.254	.210	.239	.161	.110	.107	.133	.101	.129	.132
EA2	.476	1.000	.455	.670	.246	.238	.285	.256	.128	.114	.178	.056	.132	.151
EA3	.314	.455	1.000	.496	.130	.158	.151	.112	.070	.079	.109	.095	.145	.173
EA4	.529	.670	.496	1.000	.237	.218	.267	.272	.147	.179	.173	.125	.141	.093
EA5	.254	.246	.130	.237	1.000	.590	.558	.566	.214	.160	.255	.201	.292	.295
EA6	.210	.238	.158	.218	.590	1.000	.601	.533	.219	.135	.248	.152	.208	.185
EA7	.239	.285	.151	.267	.558	.601	1.000	.585	.201	.171	.268	.135	.195	.250
EA8	.161	.256	.112	.272	.566	.533	.585	1.000	.224	.210	.274	.167	.204	.209
EA9	.110	.128	.070	.147	.214	.219	.201	.224	1.000	.604	.422	.209	.229	.201
EA10	.107	.114	.079	.179	.160	.135	.171	.210	.604	1.000	.516	.171	.213	.234
EA11	.133	.178	.109	.173	.255	.248	.268	.274	.422	.516	1.000	.153	.218	.240
EA12	.101	.056	.095	.125	.201	.152	.135	.167	.209	.171	.153	1.000	.550	.331
EA13	.129	.132	.145	.141	.292	.208	.195	.204	.229	.213	.218	.550	1.000	.546
EA14	.132	.151	.173	.093	.295	.185	.250	.209	.201	.234	.240	.331	.546	1.000

Source : Table Created by Authors

checked so that there were no hitches in the future. Members gave their responses and facilitated in refining of the questionnaire. The pilot study was done of the questionnaire to ensure the appropriateness of the questionnaire before actual research.

Statements were checked for their positive correlation and further for the data adequacy.

The application of Cronbach's alpha and KMO techniques signified the appropriateness of factor analysis. Factors that impact employee advocacy through social media were extracted by analyzing the gathered data using Factor analysis. Being a method of data reduction, exploratory factor analysis was carried out and further, the method of principal component analysis of factor analysis was applied using SPSS. After initial factor extraction, varimax rotation was applied to determine and justify the non-correlation of factors to each other.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT

Factor analysis has been used on data gathered from 600 respondent to evaluate the factors that impact employee advocacy through social media.

Table 3**Factor Analysis Results for Employee Advocacy Through Social Media (Varimax Rotated Results and Scale Reliability)**

Variables	Component			
	1	2	3	4
I recommend my employer brand products and services to my contacts on social media. (EA6)	.810			
I recommend my company to potential job candidates. (EA7)	.808			
I am a fan/ follow my employer's brand on social media. (EA5)	.784			
I respond (constructively) when my contacts criticize my employer's brand products or services on social media. (EA8)	.782			
I do not post comments about my employer online that I might regret later. (EA4)		.849		
I praise the achievements of my employer's brand on social media. (EA2)		.816		
When I have criticism about my employer, I refrain from sharing it online. (EA3)		.715		
I speak positively about my employer's brand on social media. (EA1)		.703		
I "like" content posted by my employer. (EA10)			.870	
I pass along information about my employer's brand on social media. (EA9)			.804	
I share links to/from the employer's brand on social media. (EA11)			.722	
I behave on social media in a way that is consistent with my employer's brand values and culture. (EA13)				.856
I keep in mind that I could harm my employer's brand when interacting on social media. (EA12)				.773
I communicate on topics related to my employer's business in a way my employer would approve of. (EA14)				.719
Eigen Value	4.323	1.942	1.595	1.392
% Variance	30.877	13.874	11.393	9.940
Cumulative % Variance	30.887	44.751	56.144	66.085
Scale Reliability Alpha	.843	.794	.760	.731
Cronbach's Alpha = .823, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = .812, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square= 2925.610 ,Df= 91, Sig=0.000)				

Source : Table Created by Authors

Table 4
Statements to Measure Employee Advocacy

	Component						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I speak positively about my employer's brand on social media.							
I praise the achievements of my employer's brand on social media.							
When I have criticism about my employer, I refrain from sharing it online.							
I do not post comments about my employer online that I might regret later.							
I am a fan / follow my employer's brand on social media.							
I recommend my employer's brand products and services to my contacts on social media.							
I recommend my company to potential job candidates.							
I respond (constructively) when my contacts criticize my employer's brand products or services on social media.							
I pass along information about my employer's brand on social media.							
I "like" content posted by my employer.							
I share links to/from the employer's brand on social media.							
I keep in mind that I could harm my employer's brand when interacting on social media.							
I behave on social media in a way that is consistent with my employer's brand values and culture.							
I communicate on topics related to my employer's business in a way my employer would approve of.							

Source : Created by Authors

Out of a total of 14 statements, four factors were extracted which had 66.085 of cumulative variance. To check the reliability of the scale, 'item-wise reliability' was performed to keep and delete scale items. To know the extent to which the items are correlated with the other variables in the set, inter-item correlation and Cronbach's alpha were applied.

To check the face validity of the items of the scale, exploratory factor analysis was conducted through SPSS (Pallant, 2001). Before this the suitability of the data for factor analysis was evaluated. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was .812 which exceeded the recommended value that is .6 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996; and Kaiser, 1974). Bartlett's Test of Sphericity supported the factorability of the correlation matrix and reached statistical significance. (Bartlett, 1954). Principal Component Analysis revealed four factors explaining 66.085% of the total variance and Eigen-value which exceeded 1. Table 3 shows the variance explained.

The values of commonalities using principal component analysis ranged from .523 to .778 (Table 1). All of these values prove that factor analysis has extracted good quality of variance in items. The extracted factors from the statements were named employee endorsement, employee word of mouth, employee sharing, and employee culture. Item-wise reliability was also carried out.

Cronbach's alpha was applied to check the reliability.

1. Pearson Correlation Co-Efficients

Pearson correlations coefficients were used to extract the correlation of all items with each other. The correlation among the different variables was satisfactory and significant. The correlation analysis was conducted to determine whether the fourteen items were independent of each other or not. As a rule of thumb, there is a weak correlation between the items if the value of r ranges from 0 to .2, moderate if the value of r ranges from .3 to .6. The correlation is strong if the correlation coefficient ranges from .7 to 1. (Dancey and Reidy, 2007). Table 2 shows the correlation matrix.

2. Extraction of Factors

Exploratory factor analysis was done through SPSS to check the underlying scale. Seven-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree was used to rate the fourteen items. The loadings of the factors ranged from 0.703 to .870 and the factors having loadings more than 0.5 were considered for this study. Four factors were extracted having Eigen values 4.323,

1.942, 1.595, and 1.392. The results of the factor analysis were validated as shown in Table 3.

The Cronbach's Alpha of all four factors is shown in the Table 3. According to Cronbach, 1990 if the value of Cronbach alpha is 0.6 or above it is considered good for further research in social sciences. The value of Cronbach's alpha was .823 which was good enough to move ahead. Whenever the two constructs pass the reliability test as suggested by Sekaran (2000) Cronbach's alpha should be 0.70, the basis of internal consistency. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the first factor i.e. employee endorsement is .843 which means that it is more reliable, also called Scale reliability alpha. The Cronbach value of the second factor (employee word of mouth) is .794; the Cronbach value of the third factor (employee sharing) is .760 and the Cronbach value of the fourth factor (employee culture) is .731; so, all four factors can be accepted as reliable factors (Heijden *et al.*, 2001).

2.1. Employee Endorsement

The first factor is employee endorsement and it reveals four items. Employees endorse the goods or services of their organization to their contacts such as friends, families, and co-workers (Fullerton, 2011). Using media or other platforms to communicate the company's message to their friends and social networks is employee endorsement. The goals of these messages are to increase brand recognition and generate leads for sales. The scale reliability of this factor is .843. The factor loadings of the four items i.e. *I am a fan / follow my employer brand on social media, I recommend my employer brand products and services to my contacts on social media, I recommend my company to potential job candidates, I respond (constructively) when my contacts criticize my employer brand products or services on social media* ranges from .782 to .810. The percentage of the variance covered by this factor is 30.877. It covers the Eigen-value of 4.323.

2.2. Employee Word of Mouth

The second factor is *employee word of mouth* which explains 13.874% of the total variance. Employee word-of-mouth is the method by which staff members disseminate information and opinions about the business both inside and outside of their social networks. This factor is loaded with four items i.e. *I speak positively about my employer brand on social media, I praise the achievements of my employer brand on social media When I have a criticism about my employer, I refrain from sharing it online, I do not post comments*

about my employer online that I might regret. When employees recognize themselves with the brand, they form an assurance of the brand and are more likely to spread constructive word of mouth through social media (Fallon, 2014). Employees through positive word of mouth assist external audiences in a boundary-spanning (linking) role with internal familiar information (Kim & Rhee, 2011). The factor loadings of the items of this factor range from .703 to .849. The Eigen-value covered by this factor is 1.942. The Cronbach alpha value for this factor is .794.

2.3. Employee Sharing

The third-factor employee sharing has three items i.e. *I pass along information about my employer brand on social media, I like the content posted by my employer, and I share links to / from the employer brand on social media.* In addition to sharing the firm's communications, individual opinions and experiences about work and the company, also liking, following and remarking on the corporation's social media pages and columns is very persuasive for employee advocacy through social media (Latvala, 2017). Employee sharing, also known as uploading or reposting content there, refers to the act of disseminating it to one's social networking site or other digital channels. This factor explains 11.393% of the total variances. The factor loadings of this factor range from .870 to .722 and the scale reliability is .760. The Eigen-values covered by this factor are 1.595.

2.4. Employee Culture

Last but not least, is employee culture, which means that social media activity should be consistent with workplace values. The factor employee culture has been loaded with three items which *I keep in mind that I could harm my employer brand when interacting on social media, I behave on social media in a way that is consistent with my employer brand values and culture and I communicate on topics related to my employer's business in a way my employer would approve of* that ranges from .719 to .856. The Cronbach's Alpha value for this factor is .731 and the Eigen values covered is 1.392. This factor explains 9.940% of the total variance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has brought forward four different factors comprising different items that impact job-related advocacy of employees through social media i.e. *Employee endorsement* that occurs when staff members use media or

other channels to spread the company's message to their peers and social networks. These messages are intended to promote brand recognition and provide leads for sales. *Employee word of mouth* is the process through which employees spread information and viewpoints about the company both within and outside of their social networks. *Employee Sharing* i.e. distributing content to one's social networking platform or other digital channels, putting it there, or reposting it there. And lastly, *employee culture* means the activities in social media should be aligned with the culture and principles of the workplace. The current research paper's findings will be beneficial to businesses attempting to establish an employee advocacy culture. Similarly, this research will assist employees in better understanding how to improve their product promotion through their social media accounts. This Study would be helpful for the HR managers as well, as they will be guided to know the factors that affect employee advocacy in the organization through social media and also can frame their social media usage policy accordingly. There are many employee advocacy tools too which enable businesses to encourage their staff to post brand information and content via social platforms. These solutions let brands create pre-approved content libraries that their staff may access and share via social media, email, or mobile. These technologies enable social media managers to have more control over the brand voice and messaging on social channels, in addition to assisting businesses in expanding their social presence by including their workforce. Hootsuite Amplify, LinkedIn Elevate (now LinkedIn "My Company"), Smarp, etc. are such employee advocacy tools that are providing services to the companies in this concern. Various incentives and rewards should be proposed to the employees for their active participation in this regard. Employee advocacy i.e. sharing positive information by the employee about his/her company or its products or services is a kind of alternate advertising and is much less costly as compared to the advertisement. Also, employees have more credibility. People tend to believe and take the lead from what employees are saying about their company. Employee advocacy also creates goodwill between employees and the company.

LIMITATION AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this study, self-reported data is used which includes an element of personal bias and may affect the findings of the study. So, in future studies, data can be collected from multiple sources like superiors, subordinates, and peers to have the complete information. The study is from the IT sector of Tricity (Chandigarh, Panchkula, and Mohali) i.e. limited to a sector and

geographical area. It cannot be generalized to other sectors, industries, and areas. Further studies can be done on social media usage on other professions or other geographical areas. Lastly, it is a cross-sectional study. As social media is backed by technology which is subject to frequent updates is a dynamic process so future research can consider a longitudinal study which can provide better insights into how social media usage varies over the period due to different factors.

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