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ARTICLE

Enterprise social media: a study from digital natives' perspective

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Abstract

This study aims to ascertain digital natives' perceptions regarding internal social media (ISM) use in corporate contexts. Consulting company surveys, although limited as scientific evidence, revealed that digital natives would, if they had choice, quit their jobs in the next two years, showing that engaging them is already a challenge. However, there is a gap in the literature as digital natives' workplace behaviors remain unexamined, singling out this study as a unique assessment of digital natives with exposure to the workplace and its practices. An exploratory study was performed by applying content analysis of semi-structured interviews with recently employed digital natives. The findings suggest that the lifespan aspect may impact how social technologies are used for communication in organizational contexts; and that digital natives believe in a participatory culture created on social systems that impose a high level of contribution within the company. They recognize the adverse effects of ISM but consider that its advantages predominate, indicating an optimistic view. Whereas internal communication (IC) has been explored in multiple contexts, few studies address ISM influence on organizations. As such, this study contributes to the IC literature with a more granular understanding of enterprise social media's role from the perspective of the most current workforce. It also contributes to the pragmatic field by proposing that organizations can take advantage of ambiguous but tending to positive perception of ISM and leverage its use by digital natives to promote employee engagement.

Keywords: Internal communication. Social media. Digital natives.

Mídias sociais corporativas: um estudo a partir da perspectiva dos nativos digitais

Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo abordar as percepções dos nativos digitais em relação ao uso de mídia social interna (ISM) em contextos corporativos. Pesquisas de empresas de consultoria, embora limitadas como evidência científica, revelaram que os nativos digitais, se tivessem escolha, deixariam seus empregos nos próximos dois anos, mostrando que engajá-los já é um desafio. No entanto, há uma lacuna na literatura, destacando este estudo como uma avaliação singular dos nativos digitais com exposição ao local de trabalho e suas práticas. Foi realizado um estudo exploratório por meio da aplicação de análise de conteúdo em entrevistas semiestruturadas com nativos digitais recém-empregados. Os resultados sugerem que o aspecto geracional pode impactar a forma como as tecnologias sociais são utilizadas para comunicação em contextos organizacionais; e que os nativos digitais acreditam em uma cultura participativa criada em sistemas sociais que impõem alto nível de contribuição dentro da empresa. Eles reconhecem os efeitos adversos da ISM, mas consideram que suas vantagens são predominantes, indicando uma visão otimista. Ainda que a comunicação interna (IC) tenha sido explorada em múltiplos contextos, poucos estudos abordam a influência da ISM nas organizações. Este estudo contribui para a literatura de IC com uma compreensão mais granular do papel das mídias sociais corporativas, a partir da perspectiva da força de trabalho mais recente. Também contribui para o campo pragmático, ao propor que as organizações podem tirar proveito da ambiguidade, porém que tenda a uma percepção positiva das ISM, e alavancar seu uso pelos nativos digitais.

Palavras-chave: Comunicação interna. Mídia social. Nativos digitais.

Redes sociales empresariales: un estudio desde la perspectiva de los nativos digitales

Resumen

Este estudio tiene como objetivo conocer las percepciones de los nativos digitales sobre el uso de las redes sociales internas (ISM) en contextos corporativos. Investigaciones de empresas consultoras, aunque limitadas como evidencia científica, revelaron que los nativos digitales, si tuvieran otra opción, renunciarían a sus trabajos en los próximos dos años, lo que demuestra que comprometerlos ya es un desafío. Sin embargo, existe una brecha en la literatura, lo que destaca este estudio como una evaluación única de los nativos digitales con exposición al lugar de trabajo y sus prácticas. Se realizó un estudio exploratorio aplicando análisis de contenido de entrevistas semiestruturadas a nativos digitales recién contratados. Los hallazgos obtenidos sugieren que el aspecto generacional puede impactar en cómo se utilizan las tecnologías sociales para la comunicación en contextos organizacionales; y que los nativos digitales creen en una cultura participativa creada sobre sistemas sociales que imponen un alto nivel de contribución dentro de la empresa. Reconocen los efectos adversos de las ISM pero consideran que sus ventajas son mayores, prevaleciendo una visión optimista. Aunque la comunicación interna (IC) ha sido explorada en múltiples contextos, pocos estudios abordan la influencia de las ISM en las organizaciones. Este estudio contribuye a la literatura de IC con una comprensión más detallada del papel de las redes sociales empresariales, desde la perspectiva de la fuerza laboral más reciente. También contribuye al campo pragmático al proponer que las organizaciones pueden aprovechar la ambigüedad, pero sesgada a una percepción positiva de las ISM, y aprovechar su uso por parte de los nativos digitales.

Palabras clave: Comunicación interna. Medios de comunicación social. Nativos digitales.

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INTRODUCTION

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century internal communication (IC) is placed within the increasingly industrialized society. As described by Yaxley and Ruck (2015), at root, IC exists in publications written by and for employees; later, these publications started to be edited with a journalistic approach, using a paternalistic method to sell companies' policies to employees at the expense of their involvement. According to the authors, this approach started to be challenged when the IC literature started to highlight human relations, promoting interpersonal rather than mass media, reinforcing its importance as a management tool. In the 90s, IC became more established, and the connection to employee engagement emerged (Yaxley & Ruck, 2015). A contemporary popular academic definition of IC is the planned use of actions to systematically influence current employees' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors (Tench & Yeomans, 2017). Currently, IC is a widely accepted and well-established feature of any modern organization (Mohamad, Nguyen, Melewar, & Gambetti, 2018). However, IC management in organizations remains neglected or underestimated (Emerald, 2022; Zaumane & Leščevica, 2021).

Moreover, recently, the technologies that transform the way people communicate externally are being introduced inside organizations, shaping a novel communication path in the workplace (McAfee, 2009), which can be characterized not only as a change in technology but also ideology. IC has moved to an engaging, collaborative, and relevant framework, mainly led by social media (SM) platforms' diffusion into the organization's IC strategy. Internal social media (ISM) enabled employees to create, share, and consume content and participate in social networking and thus the communication by employee for employee, resembling IC's origins (Yaxley & Ruck, 2015). ISM has become important for organizational analysis (Baccarella, Wagner, Kietzmann, & McCarthy, 2018; Chen, Ou, & Davison, 2022; Ma, Zhang, & Wang, 2022), and understanding its impact has been critical to effectively implementing and using these tools in corporate contexts (Rice et al., 2017; Wei, Chen, & Liu, 2022).

Notoriously, age and life stage are instrumental in how media is consumed (Jarrahi & Eshraghi, 2019; Leonardi & Neeley, 2017). Digital natives have entered the labor market, and the need to better understand the characteristics of a cohort that is likely to occupy 27% of the global workforce by 2025 (McCrindle, 2018) has intensified. Considering various projections regarding the next years, some aspects of an economically-challenged world, permeated with issues regarding the environment, diversity, high consumption levels, and digital connection, as well as motivational factors, shall determine how this cohort engages and develops within organizations (Fratričová & Kirchmayer, 2018; Perilus, 2020). The youngest cohort holds expectations that are increasingly diffused in organizations, which will likely result in changes to communication and behavior (Jarrahi & Eshraghi, 2019; Schroth, 2019). More important, consulting companies' surveys, although limited as scientific evidence, showed that digital natives would, if they had a choice, quit their current jobs in the next two years (Deloitte, 2019), showing that engagement of this cohort is already an organizational challenge. However, there is currently a dearth of research available in this respect (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Dwivedula, Singh, & Azaran, 2019). Moreover, so far, little is known about how communication on ISM develops when introduced into organizations, and calls have been made to increase research in how it influences the organization (Mohamad et al., 2018; Rice et al., 2017). This work is a response to this call and, employing an exploratory study, proposes answering the question: how do digital natives perceive internal enterprise social media use?

This study contributes to the IC literature with a more granular understanding of enterprise social media's role from the perspective of the youngest workforce (Mohamad et al., 2018). More importantly, it covers a gap on the literature, which is studying digital natives with exposure to the workplace and its practices, particularly as it relates to their interaction with IC. This was accomplished through an empirical qualitative method, bringing a new perspective on how digital natives interact with SM in the workplace (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). Furthermore, it provides insights to organizations on how to promote digital native employees engagement by using ISM (Ma et al., 2022), while underlining its particularities.

The theoretical review conducted for the study is provided in the next section, followed by the research methodology used. Next, results are discussed, and a summary of the findings is emphasized. In the final section, conclusions, implications, and limitations are presented, complemented by future research recommendations.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

In the social sciences, the word “generation” is also often used synonymously with a “cohort,” a group of individuals born during the same time who are presumed to be similar as a result of a set of historical events and related phenomena that creates a distinct generation gap (Parry & Urwin, 2011). However, as discussed later by Parry and Urwin (2017), while many researchers support the concept of generations, a growing group have questioned the validity of the idea that people differ according to when they were born. As a way forward, researchers are suggested to investigate whether any cohort-specific differences in attitudes are apparent. Most recently Rudolph, Rauvola, Costanza, and Zacher (2021) also argued that the lifespan perspective represents a better model for understanding how age operates and development unfolds at work and suggest researchers adopt more nuanced perspectives to understand the influence of age and aging at work.

Notwithstanding the controversial discussions on generational aspect, nowadays, there is a popularly-known cohort now entering the labor market (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Dwivedula et al., 2019). Separated from its predecessor Millennials, often labeled as digital natives, they are the first cohort to have had Internet technologies and social networks readily available to use. Nonetheless, there is an apparent paradox in the definition of digital natives, which is to assume that being competent to operate in the new environment is the same as being fully satisfied there (Young & Åkerström, 2016). Being native might not mean being entirely content or secure. Digital natives make good and effective use of online tools and resources, but they also seem aware of the trade-offs they make, expressing disquiet and distrust about SM. There is a twofold relationship: they acknowledge the negative impacts of SM but agree that the technology's benefits outweigh the risks (Deloitte, 2019).

Digital natives and organizations

Throughout the last decade, academic researchers, as well as web-based publications and market consultancy surveys, have intended to disclose digital natives' expectations, beliefs, and behaviors towards the work environment: Transparency, self-reliance, flexibility (Arar & Önerenb, 2018; Maloni, Hiatt, & Campbell, 2019), personal freedom (Randstad, 2019), trust, rewards (Berge & Berge, 2019), and the possibility for learning and development (Fratričová & Kirchmayer, 2018) are non-negotiable aspects of digital natives' work ethics. For digital natives, individual values must match their organization's culture or environment (Hampton & Welsh, 2019; Maloni et al., 2019). They are expected to patronize and support companies that align with their values, and they will not hesitate to lessen or end relationships when they disagree with companies' business practices (Deloitte, 2019). While seeking stability and financial security (Grow & Yang, 2018), having a work-life balance (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Dwivedula et al., 2019; Hampton & Welsh, 2019; Arar & Önerenb, 2018) is the most relevant form of maintaining a psychological and motivational state within the work environment. They value the social environment and expect a supportive work environment (Grow & Yang, 2018), mentored by superiors and supported by co-workers (L. Z. Berge & M. B. Berge, 2019). They aspire for a good working relationship and social contact with co-workers and leads and to extend their network (Grow & Yang, 2018; Hampton & Welsh, 2019).

ISM and lifespan

In a systematic literature review on digital natives' career aspirations, Barhate and Dirani (2022) indicated a gap in the literature as digital natives' workplace behaviors remain unexamined because of their poor exposure to the current labor market. Moreover, Jarrahi and Eshraghi (2019) argued that generational membership has an impact on how social technologies are used for communication in organizational contexts. This increases the concern for the lack of awareness regarding ISM from the perspective of the youngest workforce.

In fact, Leonardi and Neeley (2017) stated that one common mistake made by companies and managers is a flawed assumption that Millennials would embrace internal social tools in the same way as outside the workplace. A potential reason is that Millennials are accustomed to tie SM to an informal environment, having difficulty with the notion that social tools can be used for work purposes.

This awareness was even anticipated in some academic references: Friedl and Verčič (2011) revealed that Millennials' preference for digital media in their personal lives was not necessarily reflected in their business lives, nevertheless lacking any assessment of the potential reasons for it. Also, according to Boughzala (2016), the private usage of SM by Millennials did not guarantee effective workplace adoption. They were concerned about being labeled as geeks and displayed a more individualistic and mostly opportunistic interest in ISM use, such as building their professional network, building their reputation, being recognized, increasing their employability, and finding new mobility opportunities. Similarly, Treem, Dailey, Pierce, and Leonardi (2015) examined the workers' expectations regarding ISM implementation, showing that younger individuals and those who heavily used SM outside of work were largely skeptical about the technology's potential usefulness within work and were unwilling to engage with the technology when implemented. Skepticism related to them viewing all SM as personal and expressive and, consequently, inappropriate for task-orientated behaviors. Older workers and those who did not have significant SM experience outside of work were largely optimistic about the potential usefulness of ISM. They were able to view it as different than public SM and perceived the technology as potentially useful for organizational activities.

Therefore, the academic literature reviewed reinforces that Millennials' perception of technology's utility is formed differently when it is used in the workplace rather than outside, as suggested by O'Mahony and Barley (1999). Additionally, Chen et al. (2022) recently found that job performance can be enhanced when using ISM for work-related purposes. However, interaction of work- and social-related use is negative for ISM on job performance. Their findings highlight the significant distinction of SM use in the workplace.

METHODOLOGY

In light of this study's exploratory nature and the desire to investigate a contemporary circumstance within a real-life context, a qualitative single case study methodology was chosen (Yin, 2017). Since this study focused on the social construction of reality – how and why people see the world the way they do – the interpretive philosophical approach was preferred (Myers, 2013).

The interviewees for this case study were selected inside a global multidisciplinary management, engineering, and consultancy company, acting in mining and metals, energy, and infrastructure sectors. For our purpose, units of observation were individuals born since 1995. More importantly, the younger company employees typically meet the digital natives' cohort description: as part of developed social levels, they have a higher academic education, and they have been exposed to the internet since birth. The interviewees were selected via purposive and convenience sampling since the participants were available at the time, and they held important information needed for this study. As discussed by Boddy (2016), in qualitative research, the determination of sample size is contextual and partially dependent upon the scientific paradigm under which investigation takes place. Practical research indicates that samples of 12 among a relatively homogeneous universe may be sufficient to achieve data saturation, a number after which the addition of new data neither improves the explanations of the themes or categories nor generates any new ones.

As such, for data collection, a total of 12 in-depth semi-structured interviews were administered from October to December 2021, each lasting about one hour. The semi-structured interview generates rich data in the participant's own voice that can deepen theoretical understandings of a complex phenomenon. It has unique potential for obtaining access to the lived everyday world and also allows an understanding issues and events from the interviewee's perspective (Yin, 2017).

Interview texts were analyzed using content analysis, a technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of the manifest content of communication (Bardin, 1977). Owing to the exploratory nature of this research, instead of a quantitative content analysis that typically entails applying predefined categories to the source, an ethnographic content analysis approach was chosen (Altheide, 1996). Ethnographic content analysis, sometimes referred to as qualitative content analysis, refers to an approach that emphasizes the investigator's role in the construction of the meaning of and in texts (Altheide, 1996). Thus, the aim is to be systematic and analytic but not rigid. It has a heuristic function, as it enriches the exploratory attempt and increases the propensity for discovery. In this case, the presence or absence of a given content feature or set of features in a message fragment is taken into account (Bardin, 1977). Therefore, there is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding meaning in the context in which it appeared. As such, it employs some initial categorization, but there is greater potential refining those categories and generating new ones (Bryman, Bell, Reck, & Fields, 2021).

Initial categorization can involve the use of a theoretical foundation in applying a coding scheme to study a particular phenomenon in textual data. The analysis starts with a theory or relevant research findings as guidance for initial codes. As presented in Box 1, theoretical background, as well as pilot interviews, supported this study's initial categorization, and an inductive approach was applied in the data analysis – in the case that there was an emergence of new themes or additional categories beyond the existing coding scheme (Bryman et al., 2021). As a result of this process, the interviews were separated into content areas.

In data preparation, the interviews were recorded and transcribed using an online interview platform. The transcriptions were read by the authors several times to obtain a sense of the whole. Using Microsoft Excel® and Word®, data were examined in a holistic manner, as major themes became evident in each interview's conversations. Then text segments that could be correlated to a content area were extracted and brought together to constitute the unit of analysis. Finally, the content areas were analyzed as a whole.

Box 1
Content areas and categories

Private usage of SM	Use Motivation Behavior	Digital natives have a twofold relationship with digital devices and SM: they acknowledge the negative impacts but agree benefits outweigh risks (Deloitte, 2019).
		Digital natives make good and effective use of online tools and resources but are also too aware of the compromises (Young & Åkerström, 2016).
Nature of the interaction with ISM	Familiarity Uses Impact	Digital natives expect to work with technology at their jobs (Deloitte, 2019).
		Flawed assumption that Millennials would embrace internal social tools in the same way they do outside the workplace (Leonardi & Neeley, 2017).
		The private usage of SM by Millennials was not a guarantee for an effective adoption in the workplace (Boughzala, 2016).
		Younger individuals and those who had used SM heavily outside of work were largely skeptical about the technology's potential usefulness within work and were unwilling to engage with it (Treem et al., 2015).
		Millennials preference for digital media in their personal lives was not necessarily reflected in their business lives (Friedl & Verčič, 2011).
Initial perceptions of ISM	Characteristics Comparison with private SM Personal data	Digital natives aspire for a good working relationship and social contact with co-workers and leads, and to extend their network (Grow & Yang, 2018; Hampton & Welsh, 2019).
		Millennials are used to tying SM to an informal environment, having difficulty to build a notion that social tools can be used for work purposes (Leonardi & Neeley, 2017).
		Millennials expressed concerns about being labeled as geeks and presented a more individualistic and mostly opportunistic interest on the use of the ISM (Boughzala, 2016).
		Millennials' skepticism was related to them viewing SM as personal and expressive, and, consequently, inappropriate for task-orientated behaviors (Treem et al., 2015).
		Performance can be enhanced using ISM for work-related purposes. Interaction of work- and social-related use is negative for ISM on performance (Chen et al., 2022).
ISM outside of working hours	Apps usage Control over the use Concern regarding "always on" culture Importance of readiness and flexibility	Digital natives favor work-life balance more than previous generations (Arar & Önerenb, 2018; Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Dwivedula et al., 2019; Hampton & Welsh, 2019).
		Flexibility and personal freedom are non-negotiable aspects of digital natives' work ethics (Bohdziewicz, 2016; Randstad, 2019).

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

DATA ANALYSIS

Private SM use

The respondents consent to spending substantial time on private SM, although some are believed to be reducing the time connected. For example, one participant described it as “very present in daily life”, whereas another one alleged using it “a lot less today than a couple years ago.” Most respondents related that the detrimental aspect of using private SM is that it is time-consuming and takes free time and focus from other activities or tasks. When questioned about the reason for being connected, the primary justification is communication with friends and family, followed by seeking general information, as described by one participant who usually searches for “news about the world, in order to be more informed.”

By contrast, in the interview responses, SM use for entertainment is somehow minimized. This may indicate the need to justify their presence there, in other words, to justify their use of SM for a more noble cause. Widén, Lindström, Brännback, Huvila, and Nyström (2015) noted, through digital natives' self-related emotions regarding SM use, that when they perceive that they are exceeding an acceptable time limit, feelings of anxiety, shame, guilt, and embarrassment are expressed. In light of what was suggested by research presented on the theoretical background, that digital natives express a feeling of uneasiness and pessimism about private SM (Deloitte, 2019), the responses indicate that this discomfort is expressed as a desire to be less connected or to make a more distinguished use of it. In fact, one respondent considers that being less connected would make him “calmer and more focused on other activities”.

Therefore, the interview responses corroborate the idea that digital natives have a twofold relationship with digital devices and SM (Deloitte, 2019; Young & Åkerström, 2016). They indicate that digital natives acknowledge SM's negative impacts, sometimes by hiding use, but agree that the technology's benefits, in this case mainly expressed as interaction with acquaintances and for knowledge acquisition, outweigh its disadvantages. This duality is reinforced by inferring from the interviews that respondents would prefer to spend less time connected but cannot directly control the amount of time they spend on private SM, sometimes even relying on an alarm to indicate that a time limit was exceeded.

Nature of the interaction with ISM

The interview responses indicate that digital natives do not show the same beliefs and behavior as Millennials regarding ISM, especially as it relates to adoption and acceptance. Preceding research unveiled that the assumption that Millennials would embrace ISM tools in the same way as outside the workplace was flawed (Leonardi & Neeley, 2017), and that younger individuals and those who had used SM heavily outside of work were largely skeptical about the technology's potential usefulness within work and were unwilling to engage with it (Treem et al., 2015).

By contrast, participants acknowledge being “really familiar” with and “frequent users” of social media tools at work, and the responses indicate that digital natives are not just adopting and accepting it, they are already absorbed by it. The answers produce the impression that the SM platforms are immersed in employees' regular activities, and it emerges as a fundamental part of the company's IC. Although they only recently arrived in the labor market, the respondents even refer to recent increased ISM use. As such, they demonstrate high levels of engagement with ISM, considering themselves routine users, making use of the tools daily.

However, at this point of the interview, the uses and applicability of the IC tools are somehow narrowed by the respondents by emphasizing only a few features, mainly used to collaborate over documents and communication with colleagues. Attention is not drawn to blogs and wikis, neither to further channels, for example, push communication from the organization. Likewise, a “big picture” of ISM as a complex communication platform does not seem to be completely clear at this interview stage. By decreasing the platform's reach, there may be an indication that ISM is not a subject on the tops of the employees' heads. In other words, they are naturally connected to the platform, and in some cases, do not realize how it is already profoundly present in their routine activities.

Although with a reduced awareness about the platform, respondents positively assess ISM impact on their professional life. The aspects that they considered most are better collaboration and communication, dynamism, and higher productivity.

Initial perceptions of ISM

When asked about ISM's main characteristics, the respondents identified different aspects. Some looked at the features and indicated their similarity to standard SM tools used outside of the work environment, culminating in greater direct interaction owing to familiarity with similar interfaces. Others pointed out its attributes, especially collaboration and communication readiness, or in the words of one participant, an "easy way to access anyone".

Drawing a parallel between private messaging and ISM, the respondents recognize several standard features and implications. However, there was a need to underline the differences, mainly related to the purposes of use and the content available on each of them. SM in an organizational context is somehow leveraged by the interviewees, considered more legitimate, relating usage for entertainment purposes only on private tools; one participant said ISM is "a lot more a formal." Moreover, most of them believe in a required separation between the private and professional contexts. Most of them show no interest in sharing personal data within organizational SM. However, one of the respondents articulated "being comfortable with sharing personal data on ISM" but stressing their capacity to "filter the content".

This narrative posits some similarities with literature findings regarding Millennials, in particular the view of SM tied to an informal environment, being personal and expressive, and, consequently, inappropriate for task-oriented behaviors or work purposes (Boughzala, 2016; Leonardi & Neeley, 2017; Treem et al., 2015). Also, although research has shown that digital natives aspire for a good working relationship and social contact with co-workers and leads, and to extend their network (Grow & Yang, 2018; Hampton & Welsh, 2019), the interview narrative line up with Chen et al. (2022), finding that job performance is enhanced when using ISM for work-related purposes, but interaction of work- and social-related use is negative for ISM on job performance.

Therefore, although, as previously mentioned, digital natives' responses indicate that ISM acceptance and adoption would not be a problem, there remains a similarity with the reasons posited for Millennials not embracing it, thus raising the question of whether this should be an attention point for organizations. These results confirm that lifespan membership has an impact on how social technologies are used for communication in organizational contexts (Jarrahi & Eshraghi, 2019).

Again, the responses indicate a certain duality: they want the SM at the workplace to be similar to private – at least they say they like it this way – but they also think there should be a separation. This raises some questions, such as, if the tools they use are very similar, are they not inclined to share similar content and promote similar behavior? Moreover, what if they were the same tool, such as in some companies that spread WhatsApp's use for IC? How do they draw that line?

Delving into the duality matter, considering contemporary society, the linkage of entertainment only to private context and the idea of control over sharing or not sharing personal information at work seems a utopian perception and an attempt to picture an (unreal) line between the contexts. Indeed, yoga classes with team workers at the company's Teams app and Yammer groups on chess were put in a sealed box during the interview. Moreover, studies have indicated that employees' curiosity about non-work-related and work-related interactions motivates them to use ISM sites (Neeley & Leonardi, 2018), and that companies should encourage sharing of non-work-related content to seed work-related interactions (Leonardi, 2017).

Additionally, the interview responses reveal that digital natives believe in behaving entirely differently in the workplace as compared with privately, which could possibly corroborate O'Mahony and Barley's (1999) idea that people's perception of technology's utility is formed differently when it is used in the workplace rather than outside of it. However, the question that arises is whether this idea remains valid in our contemporary society in which a blurred line between personal and professional is expanding.

ISM outside of working hours

The analysis of the responses showed an interesting ambiguity related to digital natives' beliefs on work-life balance. The interviewees essentially admitted that ISM helps remove the barrier between work and private life, making the interaction between personal and professional much more frequent, blurring the lines between work and rest times, and distorting work-life balance. One participant even referred to the term "always alert", in relation to ISM usage outside working hours.

Moreover, the respondents demonstrate some concern regarding an “always connected” culture. However, the detriment of this culture is somehow diminished by arguing for the importance of the state of readiness, working hours flexibility, and convenience, combining into a hypothetical control on after-office use – “I check it when I want to” – although confessing that the apps are installed, notifications are usually on, and that checking work-related emails and messages after standard work hours is recurrent. Indeed, previous research has already identified employee’s perception that SM activeness and responsiveness could be considered a measure of work engagement (Ten, 2018).

This lower capacity to disconnect from work may result from an expectation that they should do so. In other words, always being readily available in the organizational expectation leads to the belief that those staying disconnected after business hours will suffer. In addition, it may be that this cohort feels compelled to respond from a compulsive attitude, as some of the technological activities occur off the clock because of individual’ addictive impulses to stay connected (Marcum, Cameron, & Versweyeld, 2018). Altuwairiqi, Arden-Close, Jiang, Powell, and Ali (2019) explored the problematic attachment to SM presented by users’ experiences and highlighted that individuals with a problematic attachment to SM are anxious because of the commitment to stay constantly connected.

Nevertheless, assumed self-control and urgency awareness reveal a lack of understanding that it is not about the time or effort required to respond to emails or messages, but rather the expectations to monitor and respond during non-working time that may prevent employees from ever fully disengaging from work (Belkin, Becker, & Conroy, 2016). Organizational expectations may be the main culprit of an individual’s inability to disconnect. Even during times when there are no essential emails to act upon, the mere norm of availability and the actual anticipation of work creates a constant stressor that precludes an employee from work detachment. Diminished work detachment is not necessarily caused by the time spent on handling work email, but instead is strongly tied to anticipatory stress caused by organizational expectations (Lehigh University, 2016).

Although flexibility is a non-negotiable aspect for digital natives (Bohdziewicz, 2016; Randstad, 2019), studies have shown that digital natives favor work-life balance more than previous generations (Barhate & Dirani, 2022; Dwivedula et al., 2019). This would seem to be in opposition to the push to be more connected than ever. The interviewees indicated the existence of this contradiction. Technology has become a double-edged sword when it comes to work-life balance. Digitally-native employees desire a work-life balance, but they also struggle with technology addiction and organizational expectations.

In a similar vein, although focusing on privacy, Abril, Levin, and Riego’s (2012) research suggested that Millennials were cognizant of their reputational vulnerability on digital media but were unwilling to sacrifice Internet participation to segregate their multiple (work and private) life performances. The authors also highlighted the paradoxical finding, in this case, related to private SM: employees wanted privacy from unintended employer eyes, and yet they shared a significant amount of personal information online, knowing it could become available to employers and others.

Looking to the future and pondering upcoming impacts, organizational responsibility to ensure the workforce’s inherent desire becomes more critical, even if that desire is dueling between the internal and external pressures to which this workforce is subjected. Organizations may help this by providing, for example, easy-to-observe usage statistics and warnings to users or intermediary facilities to limit the amount of system time, which can increase awareness of the need to inhibit one’s behavior and ultimately allow more vigorous self-regulatory efforts.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In conclusion, as summarized in Box 2, there is a pervasive awareness of duality in digital natives’ self-reported observations, as they recognize the adverse effects of SM but consider that the technology’s benefits outweigh the risks, with an optimistic view about the matter prevailing.

Therefore, the findings suggest that lifespan membership may have an impact on how social technologies are used for communication in organizational contexts, and that when it is lights out, regardless of the consequences, digital natives believe in a participatory culture naturally created on social systems that impose a high level of SM contribution within the company. Although the literature endorses that digital natives make good and effective use of online tools and resources while also being aware of the trade-offs they make, it seems that the positive side is winning the game also in the organizational context. Digital natives were already born in the middle of discussions about these disadvantages. Additionally, they have

to manage older generations pointing the finger at SM issues (proved or not), with statements that “back then things were better.” Perhaps they have no other option than to stress they acknowledge all the negative points when in reality they are comfortable dealing with them, like any other concerns all generations must have dealt with. In this case, taking advantage of the multiple benefits is doubly important, although without disregarding the concerns.

Box 2

Summary of findings

Private usage of SM	The respondents acknowledge the negative impacts of SM, sometimes by trying to hide use, but agree that the technology's benefits, in this case mainly expressed by their use for interaction with acquaintances and for knowledge acquisition, outweigh its disadvantages. They would prefer to spend less time connected, but they can't directly control the amount of time they spend on private SM, sometimes even relying on an alarm to indicate that a time limit was exceeded.	Besides a natural internal conflict that one could face related to any living experience – I love sugar even though not healthy – this shy duality may also be a result of being immersed in the internet since they were born – how could one point out negative or positive aspects if they haven't seen anything different? How could one stay away from it if it is spread over the society?
Nature of the interaction with ISM	ISM is not a particular subject on top of the interviewees' heads. They are naturally connected to the platform, and in some cases do not realize how it is deeply present in their routine activities. Although with a restricted view on the topic, ISM impact on their professional life is positively expressed. The aspects most considered are better collaboration and communication, dynamism, and higher productivity.	How can one clearly evaluate their workplace SM usage if they have not experienced working without it? Since they are natives from a digital era, expecting strong dichotomy on their perceptions about SM use would be unnatural, making even more valuable an examination of the interviewees' responses to identify any underlying feelings and emotions. Thereby, signs of concerns and contentment from the young generation, albeit marginally uncovered, may have an important influence on how researchers and organizations should continue working.
Initial perceptions on ISM	The respondents want SM at the workplace to be similar to private- at least they say they like it this way- but they also believe there should be a separation. There is an entertainment link only to private contexts, as well as the idea of control over sharing/not sharing personal information at work.	It resembles a utopian perception and a way to picture a cloudy, or even inexistent line between the contexts. Extrapolating, they believe they (could) behave completely differently in the workplace compared with privately, which may corroborate the idea that people's perception of a technology's utility is formed differently when that technology is used in the workplace rather than outside of it. However, the question raised is whether this idea remains valid in our contemporary society in which the line between personal and professional is increasingly blurry.
Blurring lines between rest and work times	The interviewees desire a work-life balance, but they also struggle with technology addiction and organizational expectation.	

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study's purpose was to ascertain digital natives' perceptions regarding enterprise ISM use. Employing an exploratory case-study in which in-depth interviews were reviewed via content analysis methodology, evidence-based insights were gained. The study contributes to the IC literature with a more granular understanding of enterprise social media's role, from the perspective of the youngest workforce (Mohamad et al., 2018). It covers a gap in the literature, which is studying digital natives with exposure to the workplace and its practices, particularly as it relates to their interaction with IC. This was accomplished by means of an empirical qualitative method, bringing a new perspective on how digital natives interact with SM in the workplace (Barhate & Dirani, 2022).

The pragmatic contributions from this study are also significant in a reality where individuals' changes are exceedingly rapid. More importantly, engaging and retaining younger employees is already a challenge for organizations. They can take advantage of the ambiguity, but tending to positive perception of ISM, and leverage its use by digital natives to promote employee engagement (Ma et al., 2022), without drawing attention to social-related aspects of ISM on the job (Chen et al., 2022). However, companies must ensure expectations align and fulfill digital natives' needs, such as participation, transparency, and flexibility (Arar & Önerenb, 2018; Maloni et al., 2019). Balancing the dual imperatives of digital natives can be challenging but exceptionally rewarding.

Although the conclusions have contributed to IC theory and practice, this study has limitations that require more detailed investigations and could be addressed in future research. First, exploratory research involving an intentionally reduced sampling comes with disadvantages that include lack of standardized analysis, hence the results cannot be accurately interpreted for a generalized population and within a macro environment effect, such as the recent pandemic. Moreover, the findings did not deeply advance into areas such as employee engagement and performance; nor did they deliberate on theories from the psychology and sociology fields that frequently support SM and technology research. Therefore, future work may benefit from understanding the implications of ISM on organizational processes related to human resources management and acknowledging and correlating associated base theories. Furthermore, ISM perceptions require more research in, for example, different organizations and different settings. This study's subjects are from one particular company, all recognized as digital natives. While it was explained why this group was chosen, the conclusions still need to be validated for the larger group of professionals.

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