Co-existence of social media and work productivity?

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Abstract: This paper throws more light on the ongoing debate whether social media at work reduces or increases productivity. Purposive sampling was conducted with 118 employees chosen from different parts of Mumbai City. It is clear that employees are absolutely in favour of access to social media at the workplace. In fact, a modern employer today should use this to his advantage and try to ensure that social media access guarantees better productivity. It is also preferable that organisations have a social media usage policy in consultation with the employees and to which employees agree.

Keywords: social media; workplace; productivity; hinders; balance.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Bharucha, J. (2018) ‘Co-existence of social media and work productivity?’, Int. J. Business Innovation and Research, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp.34–43.

Biographical notes: Jehangir Bharucha is Senior Vice Principal at H R College, Mumbai, India and Professor at Lincoln University College, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He holds two doctoral degrees. He has vast international exposure and has conducted master classes on India in many countries. He is the recipient of several awards for teaching and research excellence, the most recent one being the Malkani Memorial Award for Economics by the Higher Education Forum, India.

1 Introduction

It is possible today to do many things using technology which were unthinkable some years ago. One can instantly message a friend across seven seas or even show the world a picture of a fancy seven-course meal. Unfortunately, employees are increasingly doing these things while on their jobs and workplace productivity may suffer.

There has been a lot of debate recently whether social media aids or hinders employee productivity. It has been reported that more than half of Indian employers are blocking social media access at the workplace.
2 Review of literature

Mashable reports that employee participation on social networks during work hours could be costing the Indian economy $650 billion per year – or $4,452 per company. Mashable also reports that a social media interruption occurs every 10.5 minutes on average, 41% of the time gets wasted as people have logged on to Facebook.

A study made by Professor Joe Nandhakumar of Warwick Business School said that employees who used various types of social media become more creative and team-minded at work.

Inc magazine, citing a study by analytics firm Evolv, suggests that employees who use up to four social media networks are ‘exceptionally productive’ and they stay on their jobs longer.

Microsoft conducted a survey of 9,908 individuals in 32 countries which proved that it is an illusion to think that social media access reduces productivity. A new Microsoft global survey agrees, “Nearly half of employees report that social tools at work help increase their productivity, but more than 30% of companies underestimate the value of these tools and often restrict their use”.

3 Research methodology

Some preliminary reading done by this researcher yielded contradictory results and was not able to reach a conclusion on whether or not social media at work kills productivity. So the researcher put down and did primary research on the questions that came to mind.

The topic of the paper being very contemporary; the paper largely relies on primary data. Purposive sampling was conducted with 118 employees chosen from different parts of Mumbai City, out of which the usable responses turned out to be around 98 which were then extended to 100. A few employers offered their insights as well.

4 Limitations of the study

- Due to the limited sample size, the result may not be indicative of the larger populations to be assessed. Only the responses of 100 employees have been analysed.
- Due to geographic limitations as well as time constraints, only respondents from Mumbai could be addressed. A further detailed research may yield more definite and exhaustive results.
- Hardly any reference has been made in this study to ascertain the opinions of employers as this study is an employee-centric study.

5 Analysis and inferences

When the employees were quizzed on what disruptions they see ruining productivity, they gave the responses displayed in the diagram.
This research clearly shows that being on social media is not the sole distracter. A very big source of distraction is co-employees.

Some of the respondents cited the Microsoft study which concluded that using social media at work actually increases productivity.

This study also seems to go against the commonly held belief that social media usage reduces productivity. Hence, prohibiting the use of these devices at the workplace would only give employers a false sense of complacency that they are doing the right thing.

One respondent maintained that his employer expects him to work from home during weekends so there is nothing wrong in using social media at work.
According to the survey, it is shocking to note that 92% employees have used social media for personal use during working hours. This point to widespread use of online social media for personal purposes during working hours.

**Figure 3** Whether employees use social media for personal use during working hours (see online version for colours)

**Figure 4** Whether employees substitute social media for meeting customers in person (see online version for colours)

In marketing firms, a large number, i.e., 54% employees have admitted that they substitute social media for meeting customers in person. Social media was not very popular with the finance firms as only 13% employees used it as a substitute to meeting customers in person.
Employers today realise how much productivity is lost due to social media. Thus, they have made several efforts to reduce their losses by implementing various practices such as monitoring emails and internet usage, prohibiting personal calls and cell phones, etc.

Even though employers can lock down social media access within their own networks, employees have their own devices through which they can reach their friends.

By implementing a complete block of social media, leaders and managers feel they have done the right thing and think that they are extracting good work from their employees.

Figure 5  Steps taken by employers to stop productivity inhibitors at work (see online version for colours)

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Figure 6  Whether workers spend more time on the internet than they do working (see online version for colours)
Figure 7  The most popular sites visited while at work (see online version for colours)
Eighteen out of 100 workers admitted that they do spend more time on the internet than on working. This figure could be higher as our analysis is based purely on disclosed information. Businesses suffer greatly due to such habits on part of the employees. Strict supervision must be administered to prevent such events.

Sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Flipkart, etc. are the ones that are most frequently visited by employees during work hours.

46% of the respondents believed that using social media actually helps them to take opinions from others and makes them more productive at work.

No doubt most companies perceive social media as a time wasting activity. Employees with total addiction to the internet are seen as less productive as jobs that require employees to do tasks which are internal to the organisation like production, finance and the like.

However, social networking can have positive effects on tasks that require employees to form networks with the outside world. It can help in discovering innovative marketing strategies and keep employees updated with the latest market trends. It can induce fresh
ideas on the minds of employees and makes them more creative. It certainly helps them to build greater linkages with the outside world and probably come up with some solutions to problems and know their customers better.

**Figure 8** Opinion of employees on whether social media helps them to solve certain work-related issues (see online version for colours)

Companies today are trying to create internal company networking sites. It makes it easier for employees to network with each other across different branches in different countries. This helps in better collaboration and cooperation both within and between enterprises.

**Figure 9** Opinion of employees whether organisations underestimate the benefit of social tools in the workplace (see online version for colours)
34% employees believed that their organisations underestimated the power of social media.

Figure 10  Belief of employees that they could do their job better if the organisation was supportive of the use of social tools (see online version for colours)

37% employees believed that they could perform their job much better if their organisations were more flexible when it came to social media usage.

11  Conclusions and recommendations of the study

Social media is not the only distracter at the workplace – co-employees with all their nuances are in fact the main source of distraction.

This study clearly shows that social media could both diminish or enhance employee productivity and this can only answered on a case by case basis.

It is clear that employees are absolutely in favour of access to social media at the workplace, and since they do bring devices to work with them that enable it, a modern employer today should use this to his advantage and try to ensure that social media access guarantees better productivity. Banning the device at work may not always been the best solution as employees may find some way to use it anyway.

It is also preferable that organisations have a social media usage policy in consultation with the employees and to which employees agree. This should be based on mutual respect trust and responsibility. SocialMediaGovernance.com is a helpful resource that employers could refer to.

While it is true that by giving employees access to social media in the workplace, there is a possibility that some productivity is lost it is also true as this study has revealed that some will be gained, as well. Ultimately, it boils down to balancing the risks and the rewards.
Websites


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