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Screening the Digital Landscape: Generation Z Insights into Employee Perceptions of Social Media Use in the Workplace

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Purpose: In the era of digital transformation, companies are increasingly utilizing social networks to enhance business dynamics. This study investigates Generation Z employee perceptions regarding the integration of social media platforms in the workplace.

Design/Method/Approach: A quantitative approach done by the administration of a comprehensive online questionnaire, involving 152 professionals.

Findings: Findings reveal that Generation Z employees consider engaging with the public as the most significant advantage of social networks, followed by the potential for swift and effective consumer communication, while broad access to information holds relatively less importance. Negative aspects cited include heightened competition in certain sectors, increased dependence on the Internet, and an excess of advertising. Respondents also identify key company objectives tied to social media adoption, emphasizing the importance of publicizing the company and brand, expanding customer bases, fostering business growth, and enhancing labour relations.

Theoretical Implications: Negative aspects cited include heightened competition in certain sectors, increased dependence on the Internet, and an excess of advertising.

Practical Implications: Respondents also identify key company objectives tied to social media adoption, emphasizing the importance of publicizing the company and brand, expanding customer bases, fostering business growth, and enhancing labour relations.

Originality/Value: New approach to Generation Z Insights into Employee Perceptions of Social Media Use in the Workplace.

Research Limitations/Future Research: A bigger sample would be Portugal's representative what is indeed important.

Paper Type: Empirical

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Перевірка цифрового ландшафту: Погляди покоління Z на сприйняття працівниками використання соціальних мереж на робочому місці

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Мета роботи: В епоху цифрової трансформації компанії все частіше використовують соціальні медіа для покращення динаміки бізнесу. Це дослідження вивчає сприйняття працівників покоління Z щодо інтеграції соціальних медіа-платформ на робочому місці. та поведінкових намірів на поведінку використання, а також сприйнятого ризику на фінансовий ризик, ризик продуктивності та ризик для приватності.

Дизайн / Метод / Підхід дослідження: Кількісний підхід, реалізований шляхом проведення комплексного онлайн-опитування за участю 152 фахівців.

Результати дослідження: Результати показують, що працівники покоління Z вважають контакт з громадськістю найбільш значущою перевагою соціальних мереж, за якою слідує потенціал швидкої та ефективної комунікації зі споживачами, в той час як широкий доступ до інформації має відносно невелике значення. Серед негативних аспектів називають посилення конкуренції в певних галузях, більшу залежність від інтернету та надлишок реклами. Респонденти також визначили основні цілі компаній, пов'язані з впровадженням соціальних медіа, підкресливши важливість популяризації компанії та бренду, розширення клієнтської бази, сприяння зростанню бізнесу та покращення робочих відносин.

Теоретична цінність дослідження: До негативних аспектів можна віднести посилення конкуренції в певних секторах, зростання залежності від інтернету та надмірної реклами.

Практична цінність дослідження: Респонденти також визначили основні цілі компаній, пов'язані з впровадженням соціальних медіа, підкресливши важливість популяризації компанії та бренду, розширення клієнтської бази, сприяння зростанню бізнесу та покращення трудових відносин.

Оригінальність / Цінність дослідження: Новий підхід до покоління Z щодо сприйняття працівниками використання соціальних мереж на робочому місці.

Обмеження дослідження / Майбутні дослідження: Більша вибірка була б репрезентативною для Португалії, що дійсно важливо.

Тип статті: Емпіричний

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

1. Introduction

In the midst of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, characterized by digital transformation and societal transition, innovative technologies within information technology (IT) are reshaping the corporate landscape. The impact of this transformation has been further intensified by the unforeseen challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, influencing organizational competitiveness and compelling a surge in digitization, technological investments, and the widespread use of social networks (*Guo et al., 2020*).

The ubiquity of Information Technology (IT) is evident as companies integrate information systems not only for internal connectivity but also to engage with the external world, competing through online platforms. The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the trend, fostering a dynamic environment where companies increasingly rely on online interactions, teleworking, and digital platforms to maintain competitiveness.

Within this landscape, the rise of digital platforms is extraordinary, creating jobs and transforming the business landscape. The constant evolution of platforms, marked by frequent updates and changes, reflects the adaptability required in the digital era (*Moreira, 2019*). The survival of contemporary companies is intrinsically linked to the internet and social media, crucial for growth, market reach, and customer engagement.

This study delves into the perspectives of employees, particularly those belonging to Generation Z, on the use of social networks in the workplace. In the context of Portugal, where research on this subject is both rare and recent, the study aims to bridge the gap in understanding employee viewpoints, offering insights distinct from the company-centric analyses prevalent in existing literature. The distinct features of the analysed sample, shaped by the widespread adoption of new technologies, set it apart from samples in other studies, providing a unique lens on the role of social media in Portuguese workplaces.

Utilizing a quantitative approach with a descriptive design, the study employs a survey distributed on digital platforms, reflecting the very technology under investigation. The sample comprises Portuguese professionals, shedding light on the significance of social networks in their work environments. The research contributes to the evolving discourse on the role of social networks in contemporary workplaces, providing valuable insights for companies navigating the complexities of the digital age, especially in the post-COVID-19 landscape.

2. Theoretical Background

The pervasive adoption of information and communication technologies (ICT) is ushering in a transformative era for both individuals and businesses, notably marked by the influence of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This paradigm shift encompasses a spectrum of technologies, including the Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), cyber-physical environments, robotics, sensors, 3D printing, big data, augmented reality, and cloud computing (*Lu, 2017*). The ongoing digital transformation has become even more pronounced due to the unforeseen challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, amplifying the imperative for organizations to adapt and stay competitive (*Guo et al., 2020*).

In the context of this digital evolution, individuals, especially those belonging to Generation Z, are emerging as key players in the utilization of technology. Studies in Portugal have examined digital media usage across various age groups, with a particular focus on the elderly. Interestingly, older individuals, despite potential disparities in educational qualifications, exhibit a significant embrace of mobile devices, social media platforms, selfies, applications, and videos, showcasing the ubiquitous integration of technology across demographics (*Azevedo, 2013*).

Within the corporate landscape, the responsibility for strategic investments in information technologies transcends traditional boundaries, involving not only IT managers but all levels of management (*Brown et al., 2005*). To achieve success, companies must leverage Information Systems (IS) for effective internal and external communication. This entails creating interconnected networks that link departments and employees internally, encompassing areas like production, warehousing, marketing, accounting, and administration. Externally, companies compete through online shops and customer service on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and websites (*Pereira & Oliveira e Sá, 2016*).

The power of social media extends beyond customer-company interactions. It serves as a vital resource for companies to identify, select, and verify the professional background of their employees, highlighting the evolving role of technology in the recruitment process (*Melanthiou et al., 2015*).

In the dynamic landscape of contemporary society, the continuous emergence of digital platforms is reshaping the business environment. Social media platforms play a crucial role in fostering bonds and engagements among individuals, transcending traditional constraints of geography and time. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced among Generation Z individuals, who actively participate in and contribute to virtual communities that share information, ideas, and influences (*Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014*).

Participation in online communities enables individuals, including Generation Z, to interact through various platforms, fostering knowledge dissemination, encouraging innovation, and providing opportunities for knowledge sharing between individuals and companies (*Fernandes & Belo, 2016; Ponte, 2000*). As the internet functions as a form of 'word of mouth' marketing, social networks wield influence over customer decisions, presenting a more reliable and credible communication channel compared to traditional methods, especially for Generation Z individuals who are accustomed to digital interactions (*Tomse & Snoj, 2014; Goel et al., 2019; Lukić-Nikolić & Lazarević, 2023*).

Popular social networks such as Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Myspace contribute virally to brand awareness and customer loyalty. These platforms facilitate closer interactions between customers and companies, offering Generation Z individuals opportunities for engagement and feedback, ultimately influencing product innovation (*Tiago & Veríssimo, 2014; Lukić-Nikolić & Lazarević, 2023*).

In the realm of social networks, diverse forms of comments, interactions, and mobile access offer dynamic channels for engagement, influencing purchasing decisions, and stimulating Generation Z's involvement with brands and companies (*Reis, 2013*). The evolving landscape of social media platforms continues to redefine communication and engagement patterns, emphasizing the need for companies and marketers to strategically navigate these platforms to foster meaningful relationships and encourage active participation from Generation Z, the digital natives shaping the future of technology integration in the workplace and beyond.

3. Research Questions

This study endeavors to unravel the nuanced perspectives of employees, particularly those from Generation Z, regarding the utilization of social networks within the workplace. In pursuit of this overarching goal, the study formulates the following specific research questions:

***Q1**: To what extent has the working environment changed during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?*

***Q2**: Were workers aware of teleworking support technologies before the COVID-19 pandemic?*

***Q3**: What changes have companies experienced due to the pandemic?*

***Q4**: During the pandemic, which social networks have companies increased their usage for marketing?*

***Q5**: What are the benefits and drawbacks of using social media for companies?*

***Q6**: What are the goals that companies aim to fulfill by using social media?*

4. Data and Methods

The developed analysis aims to address the research questions via a survey based on surveys by *Couto (2015)*, *Ferreira (2020)*, and *Lima (2021)*, alongside a literature review. Besides examining the respondents' profiles, the survey incorporates structured queries to address the identified issues. The survey was assembled using Google Forms, and the survey participants comprised 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 2023 to 31st March 2023.

5. Analysis of Research Findings

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 complete agreement, three suggesting neutralities, and one considering 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 9,0.

A socio-demographic analysis was performed to understand the characteristics of the sample better. This analysis revealed the composition of the 152 respondents: **92 (60.5%) were female, and 60 (39.5%) were male.** Out of the participants, **80 individuals (52.6%) are unmarried, while 68 (44.8%) are either married or in a civil partnership**. It is also possible to understand that **76.3% of the respondents,** which amounts to 116 individuals, have received **higher education,** whereas only **7.9% (12 individuals)** possess **basic education**.

The predominant demographic in this study consists of individuals from Generation Z. Generation Z refers to the demographic group born approximately between the mid-1990s and the mid-2010s. Members of Generation Z have grown up in an environment saturated with digital technology, the internet, and social media from an early age. As a result, they are often characterized by their digital fluency, a preference for online communication, advanced technological skills, and a global perspective influenced by instant information and easy access to cultural diversity (*Cunha & Valente, 2019; Lukić-Nikolić & Lazarević, 2023*).

This group falls under the mandatory education category and, as such, does not meet a crucial criterion for the sample – engagement in professional work.

The **companies' activity fields**, where the respondents work, are Industry/Production, Trade/Transport/Distribution, Education, Consultancy, Telecommunications/Informatics, Health, Banking/Insurance, Public Administration, and Construction amongst others, as we can see by observing *Fig. 1*.

According to *Fig. 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%.

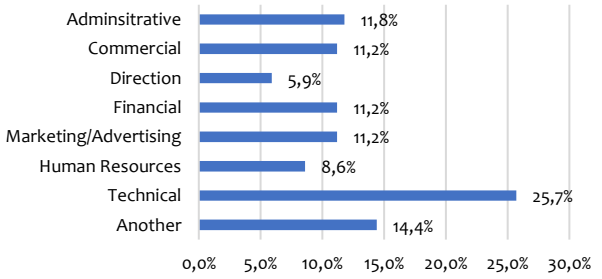


Figure 1: Professional Area of the Respondent

***Source:** Research Data, 2023*

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).

The ongoing repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdown have compelled numerous companies to adapt swiftly, restructuring processes and teams to maintain functionality. In this transformative period, remote technologies, especially innovative platforms like Zoom and Teams, have emerged as vital tools facilitating the restructuring efforts of companies, enabling employees, including those from Generation Z, to continue their work seamlessly (*Brown et al., 2005*).

The significance of these technologies extends beyond mere operational continuity; their absence could potentially lead to the closure of many businesses. Such a scenario carries with it negative implications not only for individual companies but also for the broader economy and society. The potential outcomes include a decrease in Gross Domestic Product (GDP), employment rates, income levels, and overall consumption. Consequently, such economic challenges could have a cascading effect on the well-being of the population, underlining the critical role of remote technologies in sustaining both individual enterprises and the larger socioeconomic landscape.

Q1: To what extent has the working environment changed during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown?

Grasping the profound transformation in work dynamics due to the COVID-19 pandemic is essential. Before the outbreak, only a small fraction, 11.2 percent (17 respondents), reported that their companies facilitated telecommuting. Yet, the pandemic served as a catalyst for a dramatic shift in employment practices, with an overwhelming 62.5 percent (97 respondents) adopting remote work during this time. This period marked a significant evolution in the working environment, primarily characterized by a substantial pivot towards remote working, as demonstrated by the same 62.5% of participants transitioning to work from home arrangements.

Q2: Were workers aware of teleworking support technologies before the COVID-19 pandemic?

The sample mention that before the COVID-19 pandemic, workers' awareness of teleworking support technologies varied, with only a minority being familiar with or having access to these tools through their employers. With COVID-19 pandemic things changed.

The limited awareness and familiarity with teleworking support technologies before the COVID-19 pandemic can be attributed to several factors. Primarily, teleworking wasn't as widespread or necessary for many businesses, leading to a lack of emphasis on such technologies in the workplace. Additionally, companies might not have invested in or promoted the use of these technologies due to the traditional emphasis on in-office work. As a result, employees had little reason to explore or become proficient in these tools until the pandemic necessitated a shift to remote work,

highlighting the importance and utility of teleworking support technologies (*Tomse & Snoj, 2014; Goel et al., 2019; Lukić-Nikolić & Lazarević, 2023*).

Q3: What changes have companies experienced due to the pandemic?

Due to the pandemic, companies experienced a range of significant changes, including a pivot to remote work for a substantial portion of their workforce, as evidenced by 62.5% of respondents working from home. This shift required businesses to adopt or enhance teleworking support technologies and adjust their operational strategies. Additionally, companies had to restructure their commercial areas, moving towards online promotion of services and products to accommodate social distancing measures and the closure of physical spaces. There was also a need to adapt sales techniques and customer engagement practices to the new digital-first environment. These changes not only affected day-to-day operations but also prompted a reevaluation of long-term business models and strategies in response to the altered landscape of consumer behavior and market demands.

Fig. 2 illustrates some factors that respondents believe the company 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.

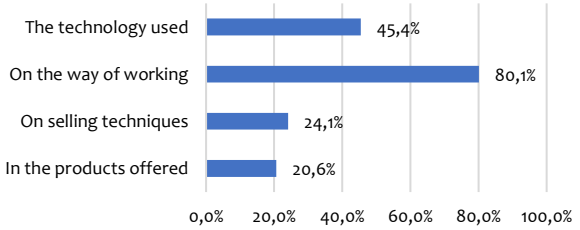


Figure 2: Factors for implementing or adapting for companies during the pandemic

Source: *Research Data, 2023*

Q4: During the pandemic, which social networks have companies increased their usage for marketing?

The truth is 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 in study, 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 *Fig. 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.

Q5: What are the benefits and drawbacks of using social media for companies? The analysis makes 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 *Fig. 4* and *Fig. 5*.

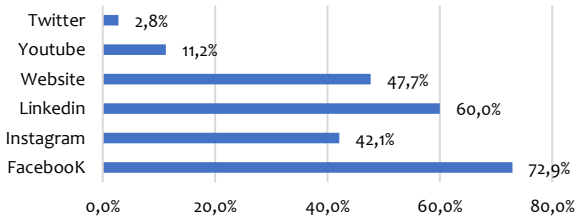


Figure 3: Shows the social networks that companies use to advertise their goods and services

Source: *Research Data, 2023*

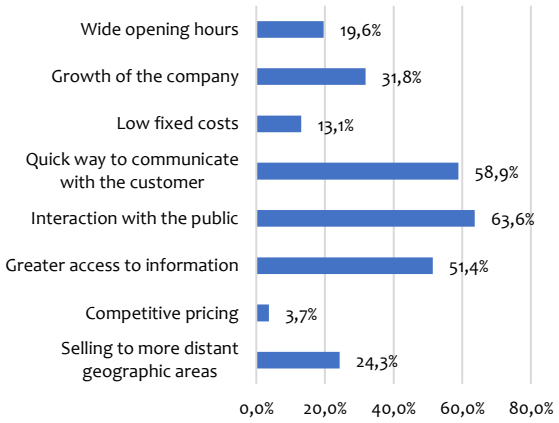


Figure 4: Company benefits of using social networks

Source: *Research Data, 2023*

According to *Fig. 4*, the benefits of using social media during COVID19 include:

1. A better and more intensive Interaction with the Public (63.6%)

Social networks facilitated direct and dynamic interaction between companies and their audience, allowing for immediate feedback and engagement specifically during COVID19.

2. Effective Communication with Customers (58.9%)

Social media offered platforms for rapid and effective communication, enabling companies to disseminate information, respond to queries, and engage with customers efficiently.

3. Greater Access to Information (51.4%)

The platforms provided companies with extensive access to market and customer data, trends, and insights, aiding in better decision-making and strategy formulation.

Conversely, it is possible to analyse the drawbacks of using social media for companies in *Fig. 5*.

1. Dependence on the Internet (40.2%)

Heavy reliance on online connectivity also posed challenges, especially in scenarios of internet downtime or digital divide issues.

2. High Competition in Certain Areas (40.2%)

The accessibility of social networks means increased competition among businesses, making it harder to stand out.

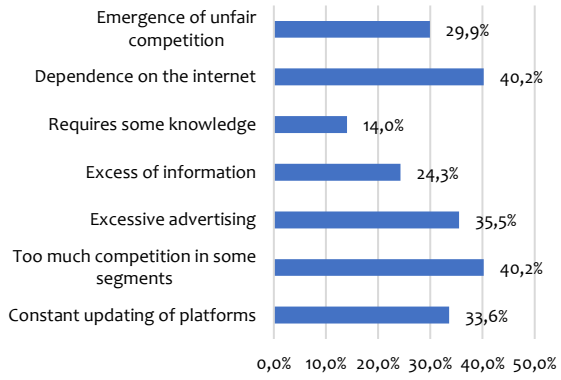


Figure 5: Drawbacks of companies using social networks

Source: *Research Data, 2023*

3. Excessive Advertising (35.5%)

The saturation of advertisements on social networks overwhelmed consumers, potentially diluting the impact of marketing efforts.

The analysis also indicates that, while companies aim to use social media to enhance brand awareness, facilitate marketing efforts, and boost revenue, they are less focused on using these platforms for expanding their customer base, fostering commercial relationships, and broadening operational areas. Moreover, the pandemic has significantly influenced how companies and consumers interact with social media, with many respondents discovering new platforms and acknowledging the necessity of a social media presence for business establishment and growth. This shift underscores the evolving landscape of business strategies, where technology and social networks play pivotal roles in ensuring business continuity and success.

Q6: What are the goals that companies aim to fulfil by using social media?

The goals that companies aimed to fulfil by using social media, are very easy to understand:

- Enhancing Brand Awareness

Social media platforms are utilized by companies to increase visibility and recognition of their brand among a wider audience.

- Facilitating Marketing Efforts

Companies leverage social networks to streamline their marketing strategies, using these platforms to target and reach potential customers more effectively.

- Boosting Revenue

Through targeted advertising and increased engagement on social media, companies seek to drive sales and enhance their financial performance.

However, the analysis also indicates that companies were less interested in using social media for:

- Expanding Customer Base

Although an implicit goal, actively increasing the number of customers via social media is not as prioritized.

- Fostering Commercial Relationships

Building and maintaining business-to-business relationships through social media is not a primary focus for many companies.

- Broadening Operational Areas

Expanding the geographical or operational reach of the business through social media is considered less of a priority compared to other objectives.

These goals reflect a strategic focus on using social media primarily for brand-related objectives and direct financial gains, with less emphasis on relationship building and geographic expansion.

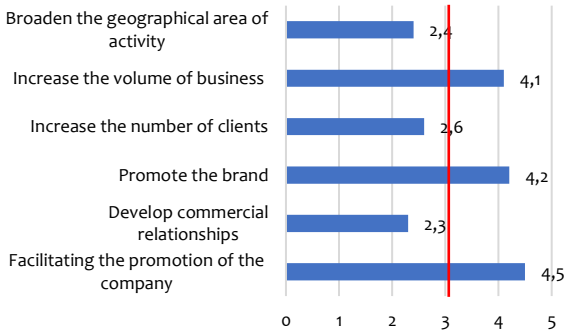


Figure 6: The goals that companies aim to achieve by social networks

Source: *Research Data, 2023*

6. Discussion of Research Findings

The research findings provide an in-depth look into how the COVID-19 pandemic has reshaped the workplace, particularly through the lens of Generation Z employees' experiences with social networks. The responses to the research questions highlight the significant transformations in work environments, technological preparedness, corporate changes, marketing strategies, and the objectives behind using social media for business purposes. The transition to remote work is one of the most notable changes, with a dramatic increase from 11.2% to 62.5% of respondents working from home. This shift underscores a significant evolution towards remote working arrangements, spurred by the pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, there was a notable gap in employees' awareness and access to teleworking technologies. The pandemic has catalyzed a shift towards these technologies, highlighting their critical role in maintaining operational continuity. Companies have undergone extensive restructuring to adapt to the new reality. The pivot to remote work necessitated the adoption of teleworking technologies and adjustments in operational strategies. Moreover, the need to move towards online promotion and adapt sales techniques reflects a broader shift towards digital-first environments. The use of social networks for marketing has increased, with Facebook and LinkedIn being prominently used. This shift is in response to changes in consumer behavior and the need for companies to maintain visibility and engagement during lockdowns. The benefits of using social media include enhanced public interaction, effective communication with customers, and greater access to information. However, challenges such as internet dependence, increased competition, and advertising saturation have also been identified. These findings underscore the balancing act companies must perform in leveraging social media effectively. Companies aim to enhance brand awareness, facilitate marketing efforts, and boost revenue through social media. However, less emphasis is placed on expanding customer bases, fostering commercial relationships, and broadening operational areas. This strategic focus suggests a prioritization of direct financial gains and brand visibility over other potential benefits of social media engagement.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the pandemic has not only transformed the operational aspects of companies but also reshaped their strategic priorities and approaches to using technology and social media. The insights from Generation Z employees reveal a landscape where adaptability, technological readiness, and strategic use of social networks are pivotal. These changes reflect broader shifts in workplace dynamics, consumer behavior, and the role of digital platforms in business strategies. As

companies navigate the post-pandemic world, the lessons learned during this period will likely continue to influence their approaches to technology, work arrangements, and digital marketing strategies. 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.

8. Funding

This study received no specific financial support.

9. Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Contributions of Authors

Cunha M.N. – conceptualization, methodology, writing – review & editing, project administration, supervision;
Pinto S.C. – methodology, writing – original draft;
Pereira M. – formal analysis, visualisation, writing – review & editing.

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