

SOCIAL MEDIA IN THAI WORKPLACE

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Abstract

Social media have become the new forms of social interaction, dialogue, exchange and collaboration. Many organizations are adapting their strategies in order to utilize the social media both internally and externally. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate social media users' demographics in Thailand in terms of personal and organizational usage in workplace. We conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with company managers in Thailand in order to explore whether social media usage in workplace actually enhance or hinder employee productivity.

Keywords: Managers, Social Media, Thailand, Workplace

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a phenomenon that enables boundless communication between social network users and businesses (Manyika and Roxburgh, 2011). Social media allows users to share their personal profile to others and let other users share their personal opinion or comment (Suster, 2010). As the number of social media users increases, more organizations are using social media to connect with employees. Facebook has 845 million active users in 2012 globally, with Europe recorded the highest rank of Facebook users about 223 million users followed by Asia 184 million. The gaps of users by gender were 57 percent females and 43 percent males, 425 million users were connected through their own smart phone, and individual users spent an average of 20 minutes per visit (Fach, 2012). The emergence of social media has become more specific and alters the lifestyle of consumers, businesses, and employees communication via these new channels (Harris, 2010). The main purpose of this paper is to investigate social media users' demographics in Thailand in terms of personal and organizational usage in workplace.

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2. LITERATURE

2.1 Social Media Studies

Social media is a topic that has been studied widely. Social media has changed to people's communication behaviors and is growing rapidly (Benevenuto, Rodrigues, Cha, and Almeida, 2009). Social media include web-based platforms such as "collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game world, and virtual communities. (Kaplan and Heanlein, 2010).

2.2 Social Media in Workplace

Social media has impacts on the efficiency of communication process in both business and daily life. The National Archives and Records Administration Report showed that 77 percent of workers who have social media account use it during work and spends approximately up to 2 hours on the site (Dougherty, 2013). Facebook is also one of the most visited sites during the working period (Vitak, Lampe, Gray and Ellison 2012).

2.3 Company's' Policy on Social Media Usage

According to a study by Robert Half Technology (2009), 20 percent of U.S companies can accept the use of social media site during the working hours but only for business purposes, while only 10 percent of U.S companies allow the use of social networking at the workplace for personal use. Social networking has both benefits and drawbacks on the workplace (Murad, 2012). A study conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that 72 percent of organizations do not have a clear strategy of social media usage. Less than half of today's organizations actually have a formal social media policy for social and digital media activities (Ployhart, 2011).

2.4 Benefits of Social Media Usage in Workplace

Many businesses are utilizing several types of social media for business purposes (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and Instagram), including allowing their employees to use social networks at workplace. Fahmy (2009) found that people who are connected to other people through social media sites in the workplace are about 9 percent more productive than those who do not. Moreover, this study found that 70 percent of employees who have personal Internet use at work helped improve their concentration level. It is assumed that by taking short relaxation, the brain will be refreshed. The use of social networking tools as part of everyday working life has led to an increase in efficiency, according to independent market report released by AT&T (2008). They conducted an independent survey of 2,500 employees in five European countries. The results showed that employees who used social media sites (SMSs) at work are more efficient by 65 percent, more creative by 46 percent, and gain knowledge and problem-solving skills by 38 percent. Employees also reported that social media has become a part of the culture in their workplace (AT&T, 2008). Social media

provide a new way for management to communicate with employees anywhere anytime. According to Swartz (2008), corporate social networks can decrease the number of usage in e-mail and instant message. It turns out that social media can help save more time to complete work assignment.

2.5 Negative Effects of Social Media Usage in Workplace

Despite the advantages of using social media in workplace mentioned above, the improper usage of social media sites in the workplace could be problematic. According to Wilson (2009), there are five major risks of social media in workplace: reduction in staff productivity, data leakage by employees, negative company reputation, fraud, and security risk.

Peacock (2008) mentioned that managers worried that their subordinates too much spend time on social media sites during the work hours. This behavior can yield lower productivity and increasing security risks to the company. In addition, excessive use of social media has led many managers to forbid social media site access during work hours (Benzie, 2007).

3. METHODOLOGY

We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twelve managers in Thailand. The interview questions are mainly focused on the usage of manager's social media in workplace, how their employees use social media in daily life and the social media effect on work performance. We asked the managers to share their experience, belief and motivations of social media policy in the work place.

4. RESULTS

This part begins with information about respondents' profile. All of the twelve managers are middle-level to top-level managers of companies in Thailand. There are six female and six male participants. The types of business include petroleum industry, financial institutes, commercial industries, apparel industry, aeronautical industry, non-profit organization, manufacturing industry, and chemical industry. Bangkok is the major location that all of respondents and their current businesses are located. The interview questions are divided into three parts. The first part focused on manager's personal usage of social media. All of respondents have used social media during work hours and used their mobile phones to access the sites. 6 out of 12 respondents use office PC, 3 respondents use laptop, and 2 respondents use tablets to access on social media. The main social media sites used by managers are Facebook, Line, YouTube, Whatsapp, Flipboard, Instagram, and Twitter respectively. The frequency of usage by managers is all the time (5 respondents), during free time (4 respondents), every time except during meeting (2 respondents). Only one of the respondents said that she accessed social media site every time especially during meeting. Based on interviewees' opinion, 5 people said that using social media in the workplace is appropriate.

The reason that they think it is appropriate is because social media can be used to contact employees in the emergency situations. On the other hand, 5 people mentioned that using social media is inappropriate because they said that it is a waste of company's resources. Only 2 people said that depends on personal objectives. They claimed that since social media offered both positive and negative impacts, employees should use their judgment. People can be motivated by social media, 7 people said that it enhances their creative thinking to make a better performance, but 5 people see it does not motivate them to work. Based on our results, 9 people said that using social media can lead to effective performance because social media encourage managers to use it wisely in term of coordination and connectivity. Three people said that there is a negative impact on jobs efficiency due to wrong time and place. Ten respondents mentioned that they lost concentration while accessing social media sites, but 2 respondents said social media do not affect their concentration.

Ten companies do not have a policy and regulation for using social media in workplace. Companies realized the usefulness of social media. Various types of advantages include valuable information and creative idea gained from social media usage. Two companies have social media policy. These companies have blocked website especially for the entertaining sites such as Facebook and YouTube because these types of content are useless and unnecessary in their current field of work. Eight companies allow employees to use social media in the workplace because social media is an effective channel to publicize the information within and outside their workplace. For public relation purposes to employees and customers, all of the companies use social media such as Facebook, Official Line Account, Yammer, Mobile App, and Twitter. In addition, social media sites helps companies save expenses such as telephone charge and transportation cost, and advertising costs.

The last part of the interview focused on managers' opinion on employees' social media usage during the work hours. From the results, 7 managers said that most employees are using social media all the time and the most visited site is Facebook. The usage of social media in organization is for keeping in touch with their co-workers and building a strong relationship in the workplace. All of the interviewed managers accepted social media friend requests from employees. However, in some situations, managers are not comfortable to accept employees' request because it is a personal space. Facebook is the most well-known site that all employees already had Facebook account.

In conclusion, all managers leave the last words about the advantages and disadvantages of using social media during work hours. On the positive side, social media provide the ability to access unlimited information and it is very fast, convenient and easy to spread news. On the other side, social media can be harmful when employees do not know the right time to use, which will affect job performance and yields lower organizational productivity.

5. CONCLUSION

Our results showed that organizations use social media in workplace. The most common way to access in the social media is using smart phone. The main benefit that managers get from social media sites is creative thinking from using social media. It is easier for managers to communicate with employees via social media. All of the interviewed managers realize that effective social media implementation can yield higher level of effectiveness and productivity. The majority of organizations do not have a clear policy on social media usage. Nonetheless, managers have unofficially asked for cooperation to avoid using smartphone, tablet, and digital device for entertainment purpose in workplace.

We acknowledge the limitations of our study that, as a preliminary study, it lacks statistical proof for our propositions and has small sample size. We recognize that the opinion of the interviewed managers may not be generalized as representatives of all managers in Thailand. Further study is aimed to include larger sample size for our more in-depth survey in order to perform quantitative statistical analysis and gain more insight from both manager and employee perspectives.

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