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Keywords

Changing nature of work, social media, technology, millennials

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The millennial generation is a generation of society that values technology, media, and connections, all three being equally important. This paper studies and theorizes the implications that social media has had on the workplace throughout the employee life cycle and how the traditional processes of this cycle have been altered. In the workforce, this aspect of the employee life cycle incorporates all different stages an employee goes through. From networking to being hired, to forming connections with co-workers, to working hard and performing well, to being fired, social media has impacted each stage of this cycle. Social media is a phenomenon that has continuously grown and has become important in all aspects of society, but this paper argues that it has specifically influenced the work world. Popular social media platforms like LinkedIn and Facebook have encouraged employees to utilize social media to help aid in networking and personal connections but have also been used by employers to determine the organizations hiring and firing process. Social media use has only increased in recent years and it is evident that the implications discussed in this paper have made extremely beneficial changes to the employee life cycle.

Millennials and the Increasing Use of Social Media: Impact on the Employee Life Cycle

Generation after generation, society is exposed to a variety of historical, cultural, economic, and technological changes. These changes immensely impact behaviors, values, beliefs, and ways of social interaction. Millennials have brought their own perspective to the world and it has been only recently that we have seen this perspective alter so many aspects of our societies culture. As of the first quarter of 2015, members of the millennial generation have officially surpassed their preceding generation, generation X. With this, the millennial generation has become the largest generation in the U.S. labor force (Stewart, Oliver, Cravens, & Oishi, 2017). People of this generation have very strong characteristics that impact the way they do their work, some of which include high levels of trust, optimism, self-assurance, strong team instincts, being highly educated, and having a feeling of immense pressure to succeed (Sausser & Sims, 2012). With these attributes and the increase of social media, this generation has been able to spread their thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs throughout society. It is crucial to recognize the influence that social media has had on millennials, who have then further influenced society. Because millennials have grown up with technology and social media at their fingertips; education and organizations have begun to culturally shift, and with that, this new form of work, the gig economy, has emerged (Stewart et al., 2017).

This new form of work includes all social media work, such as digital marketing, blogging, influencing, and self-branding (Duffy & Wissinger, 2017). These fields have all become prominent fields in the workforce today, making it evident that social media has influenced the work life of the average employee. Social media has allowed for on-demand work and other freelance and short-term gig work to completely dominate the market (Kenney & Zysman, 2016), insisting that “[t]he world of work is changing, the gig economy is here, it's here

to stay, it's growing, and you best prepare to work that way” (Enwemeka, 2017, para. 14). This is all due to the millennial generation and their immense impact on the changing nature of work.

Being a generation that has no recollection of how a society functioned before the creation of the internet, nearly half of millennials have shared that the internet is just as important to them as air, water, food, and shelter (Stewart et al., 2017). Seeing how the internet has been ranked at the same level as basic life necessities, it is evident how rapidly the digital world is growing. This new way of work, specifically coupled with the use of social media, has impacted each aspect of the employee life cycle. Social media has penetrated the workplace and has facilitated growth and change throughout all aspects and the entire employee life cycle has been altered. The employee life cycle specifically includes aspects of attraction, onboarding, development, retention, and separation (Burke, 2017). These six stages are forms of engagement that each employee experiences in the workforce. Social media has impacted each individual niche and aspect of the employee life cycle in terms of networking, hiring, work performance, work relationships, and firing, ultimately changing the overall culture and nature of work for future generations.

Social Media Influencing Networking

Social media is a phenomenon that has continuously grown. For example, every day, old applications are updated with new features and new applications are created, all to cater to societies interests. With its explosive growth, social media has fully revolutionized our society, specifically in regard to communication. Communication and connections have been extremely simplified due to the ease, access, and resources that social media provides. The following research supports the theory that I share in this section which states that social media has

changed networking and the way that people interact, form relationships, and attempt to network with one another.

Platforms online have changed networking and the way that people attempt to work with one another, making it much easier, simpler, and more creative. There are now no limits as to what one can find on the internet and with social media, finding new information on people has made online networking very influential (Bluvshstein, Kruzic, & Massaglia, 2015). The popular media platform, LinkedIn, is the top online social network for connecting with people. The crucial element of LinkedIn is making connections while endorsing one's professional capabilities and creating a personal brand. Interacting with these connections is the most important aspect of this process. The number of connections is not the critically important point, but rather, connections that matter and connections that are helpful (Hutchinson, 2015). This virtual connection can be made in several different ways. Whether a potential employee is searching for unique colleagues, jobs, or another criterion, one can search for individuals by either employer, location, or job title. Then, they can be invited to become connections, where you are able to see all of their personal information, such as job history, education, and all of their individual connections as well. Being able to see their other connections, only helps broaden one's network and helps make connections with people whom one otherwise would not know.

Personal invitations can be sent out as well, where it makes it much easier to engage in discussion groups, very similar to Facebook Messenger or even retweeting on Twitter (Bluvshstein et al., 2015). With the use of LinkedIn and other social media groups, users have found places to speak, such as professional groups, geographic location groups, alumni, and even groups based on special interests and skills. LinkedIn offers a platform, "LinkedIn Groups" which is a group form of networking where the user is able to meet likeminded people with

similar interests and expertise (Hutchinson, 2015). Pinterest is another platform that has enabled social media to aid in networking, ultimately influencing the way that employees interact online. While many may argue that Pinterest is strictly for entertainment, when the user saves virtual bookmarks and pins resources, it enables them to converse with other users who have interests of the like. Pinterest has impacted networking in the sense that it is now used for career building, organizing resume advice, and interview tips (Bluvshtein et al., 2015). By connecting people with common interests in this way, the presence of social media allows for conversations, advice, and forums to occur. These conversations and advice are extremely beneficial to employees as they begin their job search. With the use of these platforms, people of all backgrounds are able to meet each other, form connections, and offer the possibility to help one another, whether that be with general advice or career guidance.

Lastly, social media makes it much easier to maintain existing connections. Staying connected with colleagues from previous jobs is easier than ever before with the ease of virtual conversations (Bluvshtein et al., 2015). Collaborators in these networks are able to contribute at different levels of intensity in order to maintain their relationships (Cao et al., 2016). While it is important to reach out regularly to past connections in order to maintain that relationship, the virtual community will always be there to rely on for support, advice, and friendship (Bluvshtein et al., 2015). With the use of social media, reaching out to people has become increasingly easier, whether it be through a quick message via LinkedIn or Facebook, or even an Instagram follow.

These online social networks are a crucial supplement to traditional offline networking because it allows employees to see this detailed information of their colleagues, such as personal background, character traits, hobbies, interests, and simply allows the connection to flourish

much further (Cao, Guo, Vogel, & Zhang, 2016). The value of large networks has been studied by many, specifically with Metcalfe's law. Metcalfe's law proposes that the value of a network increases when interconnections are added, and the network grows. Social media, specifically LinkedIn has allowed networks to grow, enabling this value even further. Through LinkedIn, one is able to see first, second, and third-degree connections which helps aid in a widening social network. First connections are direct connections of the user, second connections include people who are connected to those first-degree connections, and then third connections include those who are connected to the second-degree connections, who the user may have no affiliation with. This phenomenon ultimately creates wide webs of connections that are able to help maintain, sustain, and regenerate work, all of which are needed when networking (Bluvshstein et al., 2015).

The connections that originate via social media can then be utilized in an interpersonal social context where social interactions have a chance to flourish in person (Cao et al., 2016). Social media provides a great platform to originally meet and without the use of social media, standard networking would be much different. LinkedIn and other platforms allow for background information to be learned before meeting in person. The way that people interact and make connections with one another has changed drastically and will only continue to change as platforms adapt to this changing way of networking. As more apps are updated and created too, social media will continue to impact the process of the employee life cycle, specifically throughout the networking sector.

Social Media Impacting the Hiring Process

Another stage in the employee life cycle is the hiring process, where the employee is hopeful to receive job offers and the employer runs intense selection processes regarding their applicants. Ultimately, it is in the hand of the company to use social media as a predictor of their

applicants' personality, but through this research, I theorize that social media has immensely impacted the hiring process and the way people can be perceived via social media.

An increasing number of hiring managers have begun to utilize social network sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter as ways to aid in the screening and selection process of applicants. Searching through an applicant's social media profile allows employers to get a glimpse of who they are, outside of their cover letter or resume (Smith, 2014). Many human resource managers have shared that they feel as though social media gives an advantage in the hiring process because it enables the expansion of the candidate pool, allows for an individual background check, and even encourages the interaction with candidates (Nagendra, 2014).

The percentages of employers using social media to screen candidates before making a hiring decision have grown, reaching 70% as of 2017 (Nauen, 2017). Close to 65% of employers stated that they do this in order to see if the candidate presents him or herself professionally, 51% want to see if the candidate would fit the company culture, and another 45% want to learn more about the candidate's qualifications via their social media profiles. Ultimately, 34% of employers have found content that has caused their company to make the decision not to hire the candidate (Smith, 2014).

Having a potential employer look at your social media profile can also be a rewarding experience, seeing as 44% of hiring managers have found social media content that has encouraged them to hire a candidate. This could be due to background information supporting qualifications, visibly impressive communication skills, or even professional and creative photos (Nauen, 2017). Through this, it is evident to see that social media has impacted the hiring process because before social media none of these potential options would be possible for hiring managers. The decision to portray oneself on social media is up to the individual applicant, as

they are ultimately individually responsible for maintaining their own public information (Brown & Vaugn, 2011). Millennials have been proven to be more cognizant of their vulnerability through social media, stating that they are aware that their reputation is at risk, should their media profiles portray them in a poor light (Abril, Levin, & Del Reigo, 2012). Because millennials, over other generations, share a significant amount of personal information online, these cautions are validated.

It has been questioned though if social media is truly a legitimate source to use as a hiring decision, questioning whether or not social media is an accurate portrayal of someone's personality. The following study investigated whether or not a job applicant's personality was reflected in their social media postings. Seventy-five job applicants of the millennial generation, an average age of 19, were asked to self-report their social media content, specifically noting if they had photos or references to use of alcohol or drugs. In addition, any use of criticism regarding their peers or even their superiors were to be reported as well. This study used the Big Five personality variables (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and emotional stability) as the root of determination. According to the study's conclusions, candidates that were prone to posting photos related to alcohol or drugs were the extraverted candidates. These extraverted candidates were also most likely to post less conservative and more experimental pictures, potentially risking their reputation on social media. Drinking and drug use has been classified as a red flag that encourages the decision not to hire a potential employee (Soughton, Thompson, & Meade, 2013). Generally, online behavior has been found to mimic the behavior that is expected in the office, therefore job applicants should prepare for their content on their social media postings to be analyzed by their hiring managers. Without the use of social media, these hiring decisions would not be impacted by any form of

photos or creative content, therefore showing how social media and individual platform profiles have impacted the hiring process in the employee life cycle.

Social Media Changing Work Relationships

A crucial role in the employee life cycle is the aspect of work relationships. Before social media reached its current popularity, it was not as likely for people to connect with their co-workers outside of work via any social platform. There have been many contradictions in regard to whether or not the increase in social media has had a positive impact on relationships in the workforce. The most common argument is that “knowing more about others may improve working relationships, but it may also increase awareness of differences and lead to interpersonal conflict” (Robertson & Kee, 2017, p. 103). While the assumption is that online connections have not only made differences more visible but detracted from physical time spent in the presence of others (Bluvshstein et al., 2015), I theorize that the use of technology in the workplace, specifically social media, has not displaced connections but rather has impacted social connections, behaviors, and relationships in a positive way. Of course, connections will still be made at work, but because of the changing nature of work and the trending ability to work remotely, social media has the opportunity to add another link of relationships between co-workers, whether or not they are in the office. Social media makes it very convenient and easy for co-workers to learn about each other and understand each other’s lives outside of the work atmosphere.

Research regarding Facebook and employee relationships has increased as this topic has become more notable and prominent. The use of Facebook can lead to positive feelings and emotions, specifically those who actively participate in writing Facebook posts, commenting on other’s statuses and photos, or even an action as simple as clicking the “like button.” These small

actions show support among friendships and have been proven to enhance feelings of connectedness and higher levels of happiness (Robertson & Kee, 2017). Along with these findings, it has been studied that social media is a powerful tool of communication that encourages employees to collaborate and share ideas, which ultimately can help solve problems in the workplace regarding disagreements on differing opinions. Seventeen percent of employees say that they intentionally use social media in order to build or strengthen personal relationships with their co-workers (Olmstead, Lampe, & Ellison, 2017) and nearly 82% of employees think that social media has improved their work relationships (Bizzi, 2018). These employees claim interactions via social media offer an extension of social connectedness, specifically with the information people put out on their profiles. People share information on their profiles that they feel as though represents them well and is important to them. Advice that employees have given in order to make fellow co-workers feel this social connectedness impact of the media is to look at a profile and try to pay attention to what is mentioned. By then making an effort to bring up this information, the individual feels emotions of interest and care (Cohn, 2011). This allows for a bond to be created in regard to people's interests and dislikes, only enhancing the relationship even more.

Because social media is accessible almost anywhere, co-workers are able to interact with one another regardless of whether or not they are in the office. Being able to interact outside of work helps encourage the strengthening relationship and bond of employees, which will help the overall company regarding their morale, engagement, and support for one another (Jeanetta, 2017). In order to increase support for one another, even more, recognizing employee accomplishments is extremely important. Social media allows for recognition to be posted in regard to employees, making them feel deserved and well-recognized. Whether an Instagram is

posted for a “work anniversary” or “employee of the month”, social media is an avenue that allows for public recognition for employees, which goes a very long way as far as employee satisfaction (Jeanetta, 2017). Because technology has made social media so easy to access, more and more people have adapted to the lifestyle of using social media platforms as forms of communication. This ultimately has impacted social connections, behaviors, and work relationships in a positive and influential way.

Social Media Impacting Work Performance

Because many employers worry that social media is a “productivity killer” which aids in distraction, more than half of U.S employers have blocked access to social network sites at work (Bizzi, 2018). From my research, I believe this is an extreme exaggeration of employers because I theorize that technology and access to social media have allowed for enhanced work performance among employees. Many employees have found ways, through social media, to enhance their companies immensely, showing that social media has impacted the workforce positively.

With the use of technology and social media in the workforce, employers have been able to make much more of an impact at their company, leading me to the theory that social media has impacted individual work performance positively. Employees are more productive with the access and ease of collaboration and engagement with others. Studies have shown that employees use social media for a variety of reasons in the workplace, but it has been found that 58% of employees claim that they use social media in order to watch the market and their companies’ competitors. This enables employees to do competitive market research at a low cost, enhancing their work performance and their profitability. Around 51% of employees have stated that they use social media to obtain work-related knowledge and keep in contact with

customers (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014). Due to the interactions that occur via social media, this way of work has been proven to be extremely engaging which ultimately enhances performance as well.

Nearly 34% of workers use social media while at work in order to allow themselves to take a mental break from their long hours, which is a necessity in order to remain productive for long periods of time. Other popular reasons to use social media include using it to connect with friends and family while at work (27%) or using it to make professional connections (24%). Specifically related to job performance, 12% of people using social media at work use platforms to ask work-related questions to people outside of their company and an additional 12% use it to ask questions of people inside their company (Olmstead et al., 2017). The popular and successful company, Microsoft, has found that social media and specific social network sites have been widely adopted by the Microsoft staff because they have specifically noticed work-related advantages that come with social media (Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014).

I truly believe that through social media, interactions amongst co-workers have created a sense of heightened motivation to do well in the workforce because of the allocated resources and increased competition. Because of this, social media access has aided in the increased performance and success of many companies and many employees. I believe that as current companies begin to report the success due to the use of social media, companies that have banned social media practices will begin to rethink this outlaw in order to reap the benefits.

Social Media Impacting the Firing Process

The last aspect of the employee life cycle that social media has impacted is the firing process. The firing of employees is a traditional part of work, but the firing of employees because of the way they portray themselves on social media is a new phenomenon that has taken

over the workforce. From the day a student enters high school and begins thinking of college, they are told to set their social media profile settings to private in order to ensure that a photo or a post would not influence any potential decisions regarding acceptance. Millennials have grown up with the mindset of portraying themselves positively via social media. Unfortunately, as social media has become much more popular, countless stories have emerged regarding firings due to social media incidents. From these incidents, I theorize that the firing process of the employee life cycle has been severely impacted by the way people brand themselves and promote themselves via social media.

Positions such as teachers, corrections officers, firefighters, and even college interns have been impacted by this social media firing process. Naomi H. was a recent hire for the competitive and prestigious NASA internship program. After she received her offer letter, she went to Twitter to share the exciting information with her followers. Here she shared, “EVERYONE SHUT THE F--- UP, I GOT ACCEPTED FOR A NASA INTERNSHIP.” Unfortunately, her twitter feed was set to public and with the mention of NASA, a former engineer for the company, Homer Hickam, was able to locate and read her tweet. He simply tweeted back, respectfully saying, “Language.” After a further altercation between Naomi and Homer, the agency was made aware of the tweets and quickly revoked the internship offer (Merrett, 2018).

This scenario does not stand alone, there are many of the like. For example, a high school teacher was dismissed from her job after posting a Facebook status sharing her dislike for the residents of her school district. She framed the residents as “arrogant and snobby” in her post, and to much dismay, many of her Facebook friends included employees and others who did not appreciate this. After posting that she was not looking forward to another school year, she was

abruptly fired (Abril et al., 2012). Many other examples like this exist such as a corrections officer who, through social media, caught herself in a lie. She had told her employer that her father had passed away and she had to attend the services. Without thinking, she then posted photos from her trip to Puerto Vallarta where several photos were shared of her having a great vacation with her friends. Her Facebook photos were then viewed by suspicious co-workers who made the manager aware of the situation. After the board of her company had a meeting, the decision was made to fire the officer (Reist, 2018).

These situations exemplify the importance that social media has in everyday lives, specifically to the way one portrays themselves. Whether a tweet is shared and then immediately deleted, or pictures are posted that represent the employee poorly or potentially question the company's values, social media provides an outlet for firing that has never been of existence before. The way that people brand themselves on social media is extremely pivotal to their future at the company and it is crucial that employers and employees make decisions regarding misconduct via social media very seriously.

Conclusion

Kenney (2016) states, "In the era of the platform, the future remains open... it is up to us to sidestep a dystopia and to create a world of every greater benefit for communities and citizens" (p. 69). Social media allows for this greater benefit amongst communities, whether it be through creative expression, a more selective hiring process, better research, resources, relationships, or enhanced work performance. It is important that as the future of social media moves forward, vital aspects of the employee life cycle, such as work performance and work relationships, are continued to be researched and evaluated. For example, there are many implications that companies must take in order to remain updated and knowledgeable regarding

the changing workforce due to social media. While LinkedIn is a very wide platform, there are many professionals who have never explored the platform, let alone have filled out a profile of their own. This is particularly true for older employees, rather than millennials (Hutchinson, 2015). That being, millennials must pave the way for both the future employees and the current employees in order to ensure that all workers are on the same page regarding the use of social media at work. Millennials, being the largest generation in the workforce, must make certain that more traditional employees adapt these new ways. Because the employee life cycle has these six stages that will remain stagnant, the changes to that occur in these stages must be accepted, encouraged, and promoted.

In addition, Human Resource departments should encourage potential employees to be more careful, aware, and protective with their social media activity due to the new screening process of social network sites regarding employees. There is a current lack of understanding and perception regarding applicant privacy, making some potential employees upset with the screening process (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Some feel as though it is both illegal and unethical for employers to intrude into certain areas of applicant's lives (Abril et al., 2012). Because of this lack of understanding, it is important that there is more research in this regard. Whether this research is based on basic internet privacy laws or specific employee intrusion, it is a topic that must be further discussed in order to create a fair conclusion. With more research on this topic, much debate will be solved regarding the validity of social media and the influential role it plays on one's job.

Because of this new form of social media in the workplace that millennials have encouraged, organizations and their average employee life cycle have been extremely altered. Millennials specifically prefer a work environment that enables independence, choice, autonomy,

and freedom (Lobel, 2017), and with the access of social media, these work characteristics are much easier to encourage in the office. I believe that with the presence of social media, organizations have been able to have many thorough ideas as to who their employees are, both in hiring the correct workers and building relationships. With the increase of social media, this generation has been able to spread their thoughts, behaviors, and beliefs throughout society. Specifically, “today’s work environment has evolved from chatter around the water cooler to a series of likes, shares, and tweets” (Westwood, 2015, para. 1). Through this, every aspect of the employee life cycle, from recruiting via social media networking, hiring and onboarding using platforms to analyze employers, work performance, work relationships and behaviors, and firing, termination, and retention have all been impacted by the use of media in the workplace.

It is necessary that more research is done in regard to the changing nature of work and the employee life cycle because as the millennial generation grows, these changes will only continue to increase as well. With social media platforms updating each and every day, there is no doubt that this change will continue to impact the employee life cycle. It is necessary that all companies are on the same page regarding protocol relating to social media in order to ensure positivity, productivity, and overall success in the workplace.

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