



EXPLORATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA HANDLES TO ENHANCE COMMUNICATION IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

The use of information technology (IT) in this twenty first century is rapidly gaining root in many industries including construction due to its numerous benefits. In the area of promoting communication, social media handles may be viewed as propelling factor and that this study zoomed into the proposition to establish whether social media handles could be explored as effective way to enhance communication in the construction industry. The purpose of the study was to establish the three cardinal pillars which were the benefits of using social media handles, challenges associated with the uses of social media by the construction workers and the impact of using social media handles in promoting communication in the construction industry. In order to achieve the purpose, Systematic literature on the three proponent pillars of the study were mainly reviewed. In reality, researchers centered the study in the New Juabeng Municipal area, Eastern Region of Ghana where social media usage has been identified through practice as a lack among construction workers. Quantitative approach was employed to collect primary data from the selection of construction workers as study respondents by distributing 91 questionnaires with the use of random sampling technique. Sixty-Two (62) questionnaires were received from the respondents for examination and analysis indicating a credible response rate of 68%. Statistical package for the social sciences software was used to analyze the data. The study discovered that respondents view social media usage as a medium of communication that saves time in providing information; it facilitates collaboration and network among themselves as main impact. However, the results show that some greater number of respondents have technological barriers and believe that social media handles communication sometimes appear cumbersome to comprehend due to the platform over-load. Based on the findings, the study recommends that construction workers need to be trained on how to use social media handles effectively so as to explore its benefits therein.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of information technology (IT) in this twenty first century is rapidly gaining root in many industries due to its numerous benefits. Though, construction industry for example is known to be complex and dynamic in nature and, it involves multiple stakeholders and diverse skill sets (Smith, 2017; Johnson et al., 2019). These skill sets include but not limited to leadership, management and communication. However, the industry is faced with communication challenges due to

the different background of the stakeholders involved in the construction process. Such challenges become difficult and severe to deal with if the team of professionals comes from different countries with different languages background. According to Olawale and Sun, (2015), traditional method of communication like as face-to-face interactions may be ineffective as a result of the language barriers. This may lead to time consuming and could yield to delays in decision-making. Such medium to share information may relatively pose potential mistakes in construction project management based on the reason that some construction workers often find it difficult to express themselves clearly when using unfamiliar language (Olawale and Sun, 2015). This makes it difficult for the workers to understand instructions, coordinate and share information effectively. Some of the IT settings, apps and medium which are used to share information include whatsapp,

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face book, email, Google drive and mobile phones.

To bridge the gap of ineffective communication due to language barrier and other related issues in the construction sites, it is imperative to examine whether the use of social media handles may be viewed as effective approach to promote effective communication by the construction workers. In view of this matter, the study sorts to deal into the various social media handles and their usage in relation to the promotion of effective of communication. The adoption of such IT tool may maximize productivity in the construction project delivery (Olawale and Sun, 2015). Per the study conducted by Hailey and Hafford-Letchfield (2019), IT fosters effective communication. However its effective application in the construction industry to achieve project efficiency is what this study tends to champion. Lu et al. (2014) also indicate that social media allows workers to share information thereby increasing their knowledge and skills base when it comes to delivery. The question is, will it also applicable in the construction industry as well? This and other related questions are the key issues the current study zooms in.

The presumption is that, there are quite a large number of construction workers who have installed social media apps such as Facebook, Twitter and whatsapp in their cell/mobile phones. In practical perspective, social media handles can assist workers to maintain contacts with their colleagues enabling them to share ideas, skills and experiences whilst promoting nurturing and mentorship in the construction industry. This study is strategically focused and centered in the New Juabeng Municipal area located at the Eastern Region of Ghana for the easy data gathering purposes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite the contributions that construction industry offers to humanity, the industry continues to play a significant role in the world's economy (Pomponi and Moncaster, 2017). Currently, the industry is been driven by technological advancement with the purpose to enhance productivity and service development. This purpose may be fully achieved at all levels if construction and project managers are able to employ information technology to improve and ensure quick and quality through communication in the construction processes. In the construction industry, communication serves as a means whereby the entire construction team shares information among themselves in attempt to achieve their ultimate goal set for the project (Oresegun, 2010). For construction managers to succeed there should be a continual need for effective communication in a way to issue instructions, making decisions and resolving conflicts (Burke, 2003). When communication gaps arise among workers and supervisors in construction sites, the results may lead to confusion and mislead workers at large. To address such gaps, this section first of all highlights the benefits accrued to the effective application of IT tools in minimizing odds and to promote effective communication in the construction industry.

Benefits Accrued to the Effective Application of IT in Construction Industry

As mentioned earlier, this portion identifies the effective application of using IT tools, softwares and apps in promoting communication in the construction industry. The first focus

looks at how social media handles could be beneficial for construction workers in their professional activities and interactions, as well as how they could potentially use it to improve communication through teamwork and collaboration. The utilization of social media handles in the construction sector has gained attention due to its potential by sharing information among construction professionals. By using social media handles as leverage, construction workers get to connect with their professional peers, industry experts, and the potential clients, thereby enhancing networking opportunities to access valuable resources (Haji-Kazemi et al., 2019). Moreover, social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Linked in allow for the dissemination of industry-related information updates, news, and become aware of the best practices to follow. Promotion of knowledge sharing and professional development among construction workers may be enhanced through the use of such platforms (Zhang and Oyedele, 2020). Smith and Johnson (2022), indicate in their study that social media platforms facilitate real-time updates, enabling workers to access critical information promptly, enhancing overall project coordination and ensuring high accuracy. Another study conducted by Jones et al. (2019) to examine the benefits of utilizing social media handles suggests that the adoption of social media handles positively provide impact on communication and knowledge sharing within construction operations. The question is will this discovery stands to be same at all times? This current study determines the fact thereof.

Time Saving refers to the efficiency and speed with which communication and information sharing can occur through digital platforms. Social media handles enable real-time communication and instant access to project-related data, reducing the time traditionally spent on more cumbersome communication methods. For example, when addressing a construction issue, workers could use social media handles to post updates, share photos, or engage in discussions with team members and stakeholders. Such communication can help in making quicker decisions and to resolve problems promptly, ultimately saving valuable time during the project life cycle (Smith, 2020).

Additionally, platforms offer features like notifications and alerts, ensuring that important information is delivered on time to relevant parties. This helps to minimize delays associated with waiting for emails or physical meetings to be conducted (Jones, 2019). It expedites decision-making and allows construction workers to use their time more efficiently since time management remains to be an essential factor to address in construction operation. It has been noted in the construction industry that workers ability to work effectively within the set time has significant influence on cost component of the project and its completion period.

Information accuracy in the context of this current study may refer to the precision and reliability of information sharing on the social media platforms. Information shared or received via social media handles by construction managers to the workers can be described as accurate and trustworthy and, should be treated as such. Unlike other situations whereby workers act on information based on hearsay. Information on project update, professional instruction given and discussions on such platform are reliable, reduction of errors and misunderstandings (Smith,

2020). It also supports transparency as stakeholders can trust that the information they receive is dependable (Jones, 2018). This may ultimately enhance decision-making by providing precise and real-time information (Brown, 2019). Garcia (2017) believes that precision and timely information are crucial and that communication contributes significantly to the overall success and efficiency of construction projects.

In the context of construction workers' safety, the benefits of utilizing social media handles are significant since such platforms can be used to educate workers on safety principles. Such platforms may offer a means of providing real-time safety alerts, ensuring that workers are promptly informed on any hazards or weather-related concerns on job sites (Smith, 2020). Furthermore, social media handles may enable the sharing of best safety practices, educational resources, fostering a culture of safety and equipping workers with the knowledge needed to mitigate risks (Jones, 2019). In emergency situations, these platforms could serve as a vital communication tool to provide quick alert for other workers to become aware of danger occurring at a particular area at the site. This will help construction leaders to take necessary measures to resolve issues arising. On the other hand, social media handles can be used as platforms to present preliminary reports to supervisors and to receive feedback. Because, foremen may need their supervisors input before moving to the next stage of work.

Construction projects often involve substantial supervision cost communication cost and travel expenses for in-person meetings, land line phone bills on lengthy conversations and printing expenses for hard copy documents. However, using social media handles for communication may significantly reduce these costs (Smith, 2019). In other words, less cost may be created for using social media platforms. Generally, digital communication is more affordable than normal phone calls, making it a practical choice for staying in touch with the remote team members. In addition, the ability to share digital documents and update instantly reduces the need for printing and mailing leading to further savings on paper and postage costs (Jones, 2020). By relying on the social media handles to communicate with the construction team members, the total budget cost may be reduced (Johnson, 2018). Cost savings may contribute to the overall financial efficiency and success of construction projects, making social media handles an attractive option for improving communication while reducing construction expenses incurred. Examining the benefits of utilizing social media handles among construction workers may automatically reveal the potential advantages of the digital platforms in terms of knowledge sharing, networking, Online presence and communication efficiency.

Challenges Associated with the uses of Social Media Handles

Examining the challenges of utilizing social media handles among construction workers involves considering various factors. Thus, using social media handles within the construction industry recently has gained prominence due to their potential for communication, networking, and project promotion (Hussain et al., 2019). However, specific challenges usually arise relatively to delay its effective adoption. It is also relevant to realize that some workers are not familiar with the use of social media handles due to the non-exposure to the

smart phones usage and other reasons.

Construction workers may have apprehensions about the privacy and security of data shared on social media handles (Brown, 2019). Mills et al. (2020) said one significant challenge is the digital divide, as some construction workers might lack access to smart phones or Internet connections. Additionally, concerns over data privacy and security may deter workers from actively engaging on social media (Roth et al., 2019). This clearly may indicate that some of these workers believe that their personal information could be at risk when it comes to the use of social media handles.

Some workers too might lack the necessary digital literacy and skills to effectively utilize social media handles, leading to resistance or inefficiency (Johnson, 2018). Another obstacle is the industry's conservative nature, which can lead to resistance to new technologies, including social media (European Commission, 2018). Aibinu and Jagboro, (2002) also informed us that language barriers and limited digital literacy may hinder effective utilization of social media handles. Furthermore, depending solely on social media handles for communication may lead to fragmented discussions, making it difficult to maintain a comprehensive record of project-related conversations (Robinson, 2017). This issue of fragmented discussion may usually occur where the focus of discussion turns into a different matter apart from the main target substance. The brief nature of construction work may lead to difficulty in maintaining a consistent Online presence (Hecker and Schneider, 2019).

Kuehr and Braungart, (2017) said that because of the unpredictable and hazardous nature of construction sites it is not safe to use or be on social media during work hours. The constant flow of information on social media platforms can lead to information overload, making it challenging to filter and prioritize relevant communication (Davis, 2020). Before addressing these challenges, it is essential to completely understand the needs of the workers and their concerns. Implementing digital training programs and providing access to affordable technology can bridge the digital divide (European Commission, 2020). Employers can establish clear social media guidelines and protocols to address privacy and security concerns (Roth et al., 2019). In a nutshell, Hecker and Schneider, (2019); Hussain et al., (2019) and Mills et al., (2020) seemly propose that exploring the challenges of utilizing social media handles among construction workers require the acknowledgment of digital literacy to establish proper safety guidelines. The inference is that an efficient use of digital system in way or the other may harness communication and collaboration among construction workforce.

The Impact of Social Media Handles Communication on Construction Site Activities

Social media has revolutionized communication practices across various industries, and the construction sector is no exception. With the widespread adoption of social media platforms, construction professionals have embraced the use of social media handles to streamline project communication, foster collaboration, and enhance information exchange. This article aims to examine the influence of social media handles on communication practices within construction projects, highlighting both the benefits and potential challenges

associated with their use.

Social media handles enable real-time communication among construction workers, including architects, engineers, contractors, and clients. Through platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn, they can easily share updates, progress reports, and important announcements, fostering quick and efficient information dissemination (Smith, 2018). A study by Brown and Johnson (2023) highlights the benefits of using social media platforms in construction projects, emphasizing how it improves real-time communication and collaboration among team members. The research suggests that incorporating social media tools can lead to higher efficiency, reduced delays, and increased project success rates.

Several studies have explored the impact of social media in the construction industry. Research conducted by Smith et al. (2019) indicated that adopting social media handles enhanced collaboration and knowledge sharing among construction teams. Moreover, a study by Johnson and Lee (2020) found that construction firms leveraging social media platforms experienced increased project awareness and attracted a more diverse talent pool. Construction professionals can leverage social media handles to connect with peers, industry experts, and potential collaborators. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook provide spaces for sharing project insights, showcasing accomplishments, and engaging in discussions, promoting a culture of collaboration and knowledge exchange (Jones et al., 2019).

Johnson and Brown (2021) is of the view that construction firms may need to integrate social media usage into their communication strategies in order to increase workers participation, client satisfaction and perhaps improve project outcomes. Johnson and Brown proponent may bring positive influence if the use of social media is well managed and controlled by the members of the group. In other words, construction companies can not only respond to client inquiries on time but also showcase their expertise, showcase successful project milestones, and engage in conversations that align with the client's preferences and interests (Smith et al., 2022). Construction industries can interact directly with clients, providing a platform for addressing concerns, obtaining feedback, and updating them on project developments when using social media handles. Client engagement can lead to improved client satisfaction and loyalty (Chen et al., 2020).

While social media handles offer numerous benefits, it also raise concerns regarding information security and privacy as alluded earlier. Doe and Smith, (2019) says that construction projects involve sensitive data that must be protected from unauthorized access or exposure. According to Smith et al. (2020), it was highlighted that construction industries that use social media for project collaboration often neglect to implement robust security measures, making them vulnerable to cyber threats. The sharing of project updates, blueprints, and schedules on these platforms can result in data leaks and intellectual property theft, leading to financial losses and legal consequences. Opinions above clearly spell out that strategic measure ought to be implemented to curve information security issue when using social media handles to share sensitive information. One of these measures is to provide restrictive system of information sharing among the members on the

platform. Furthermore, the research by Johnson and Brown (2019) revealed that construction professionals' personal information shared on social media platforms can be exploited by malicious actors for spear-phishing attacks or identity theft, putting both individuals and organizations at risk. The construction industry must address these concerns by adopting strict security protocols, educating employees on data privacy best practices, and utilizing secure communication platforms for project-related discussions. Such measures are imperative to safeguard sensitive information and maintain trust in the digital landscape of the construction sector.

The use of social media handles may significantly impact communication practices within construction projects, fostering real-time communication, collaboration, and client engagement. However, project stakeholders must also be cautious about potential information security and privacy risks associated with their usage. By understanding and managing these challenges, construction professionals can harness the full potential of social media to drive innovation and efficiency in the industry.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology is the systematic framework and strategies employed to conduct a study, gather data, analyze information, and draw conclusions. It involves the techniques and processes used to answer research questions or test hypotheses in an organized manner (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). Dawson (2007) opines that research methodology is further clarified as the overall approach to study one's research topic chosen. According to Smith (2023), collection of data through distribution of questionnaires and data analysis helps to gain efficient research findings.

3.1 Research Design and Analysis

Quantitative research design was used for this study due to the large number of population involved. The population size of construction workers in five construction companies selected within the New Juabeng Municipality, Eastern Region of Ghana were 91. A survey of questionnaire was developed which contained closed-ended questions based on the study objectives and research questions. Copies of the questionnaires were distributed to the 91 construction workers through random sampling technique purposely to collect primary data for this study. Sixty-Two (62) questionnaires were received from the respondents for examination and analysis indicating a credible response rate of 68%.

Data gathered were analysed by using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) in rating study variables (test questions posed) according to order of importance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the findings from the data collected using the survey of questionnaires received from the study respondents with the help of SPSS software respectively. Results were generally displayed in tables according to the objectives set with a response rate of 68% out the total questionnaires (91) distributed to the study respondents. The Likert scales used for the analyses are interpreted as follows: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Agree; and 4 = Strongly Agree

Agree.

Firstly, table 1 shows the response of the respondents in course of rating the benefits of using social media handles.

| Table 1. Benefits of using social media handles | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------|---|----|----|--------|------|-----------------|
| Benefits of using social media handles among construction workers | Level of Agreement | | | | Weight | Mean | Rank |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| Time Saving | 1 | 4 | 14 | 43 | 223 | 3.60 | 1 st |
| Quick way to provide information to workers | - | 2 | 27 | 33 | 217 | 3.50 | 2 nd |
| Helps to increase workers safety | 2 | 2 | 32 | 26 | 206 | 3.32 | 3 rd |
| Cost effective | 2 | 3 | 33 | 24 | 203 | 3.27 | 4 th |

The survey result in Table 1 clearly ranks how respondents view the benefits of social media handles usage. It indicates that majority of respondents believe that using social media handles actually saves time and also serves as a quick way to provide information to workers. These results affirm what Smith (2020) asserted that social media communication gives way to make quicker decisions when resolving problems. The use of social media to increase workers information on safety as well as cost effective venture were rated third and fourth with mean value of 3.32 and 3.27 respectively. This emphasis that respondents' views on these variables are quite less importance when it comes to the key purpose of the usage of social media handles.

Secondly, the study tried establish respondents' level of understanding as far as the challenges of using social media handles in the construction industry is concerned. Hence, table 2 provided the responses respondents gave.

| Table 2. Challenges associated with the use of social media handles by respondents | | | | | | | |
|---|--------------------|---|----|----|--------|------|-----------------|
| Challenges associated with social media handles | Level of Agreement | | | | Weight | Mean | Rank |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| Information overload | 1 | 6 | 15 | 40 | 218 | 3.52 | 1 st |
| Technological barriers | | 4 | 25 | 33 | 215 | 3.46 | 2 nd |
| Fragmented communication | 2 | 3 | 37 | 20 | 202 | 3.26 | 3 rd |
| Privacy and security concerns | 2 | 3 | 35 | 22 | 201 | 3.24 | 4 th |

The results elaborated in table 2 in attempt to solicit respondents view on the challenges associated with the use of social media handles by the construction workers shows that information overload on social media platforms is the number problem respondents worry about when it comes to the use of platforms

in distributing and sharing information. Technological barrier on the other hand was rated as the second challenge followed by the fragmented communication challenge with the mean level of 3.26. The import may be that some of the workers lack the necessary digital literacy and skills to effectively utilize social media handles and, as a result lead to resistance (Johnson, 2018).

Thirdly, in examining the impact of social media handles on communication practices in the construction industry, table 3 shows the results therein.

| Table 3. The impact of social media handles on communication practice | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------|---|----|----|--------|------|-----------------|
| The impact of using social media handles on communication practice | Level of Agreement | | | | Weight | Mean | Rank |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | | | |
| Enhanced real time communication | | 2 | 17 | 43 | 227 | 3.66 | 1 st |
| Facilitating collaboration and networking | | 3 | 22 | 37 | 220 | 3.55 | 2 nd |
| Mitigating communication gaps | 1 | 5 | 30 | 26 | 200 | 3.23 | 3 rd |
| Information security and privacy concerns | 3 | 4 | 35 | 20 | 196 | 3.16 | 4 th |

Among the four (4) test questions set for the respondents to rate them based on their knowledge and understanding on the impact of using social media handles to do communication, it came to light that mean values obtained were quite close to each other (thus; 3.66, 3.55, 3.23 and 3.16). This could be interpreted that respondents answers provided for the four test questions are not far from each other. Although, the use of social media enhances real time communication was rated as first priority, facilitating collaboration and networking as second, mitigating communication gaps as third and, information security and privacy concerns as last option but respondents consider all of them as truthful as possible. It is in the same view that Smith (2018); Brown and Johnson (2023) emphasize that social media handles enable real-time communication among construction workers and can easily serve as a sharing platform to provide work updates and important announcements.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

This study was designed to explore whether social media handles could be used to enhance communication in the construction industry within the New Juabeng Municipal jurisdiction located at the Eastern Region of Ghana. The three main themes adopted as pillars of the study were hinged on the benefits of using social media handles, challenges associated with the uses of social media by the construction workers and the impact of exploring the use of social media handles to

promote communication in construction industry. Data were gathered from the set of construction workers and construction stakeholders found in the New Juabeng Municipal area as study respondents through random sampling technique whereas descriptive analysis was conducted with the use of SPSS software.

The assessment on the first pillar of study; benefits social media provides, respondents articulated that the use of social media handles actually saves time and viewed as the quick way to provide information to construction workers. Secondly, the study found out that in spite of the benefits social media provides, its usage has some corresponding challenges associated with. Among the common ones the study fished out were mainly information overload aspect on platforms, technological barriers among some of the construction workers and the fragmentation nature of communication construction workers experience sometimes. However, the outcomes discovered on the last pillar of the study thus; impact of the use of social media indicated clear that the use thereof has promoted communication in the construction industry over time in a real emergency times, facilitating collaboration and networking among construction professionals.

Recommendation

Based on the study findings established in 5.1 above, it is prudent to perhaps recommend the following which could serve as measures to improve the use of social media handles to ensure effective communication among construction workers in the study jurisdiction:

- Construction workers should be trained in using social media handles effectively in order to explore its benefits as a tool to improve communication at the construction site.
- Construction project stakeholders should be encouraged to actively participate in the use of social media handles as a source to increase transparency, collaboration and reporting channels.

Limitation and further research

This study findings and recommendations are strictly based on the respondents' views and understanding on the subject matter posed in this study. Hence, further study could be proposed to investigate into how an IT software can be developed for only construction activities communication and reporting purposes. Such investigation may outline some measures to address information overload on platforms and fragmentation challenges this current study shown.

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