

Employee Social Media Risk Report

MAY 2021

See your employees' behaviour on social media - minimise the risks and maximise the opportunities.



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"Activating employee voices on social media will always come with an element of risk. Brands have become transparent and accessible like never before, making it difficult to control online reputation. But organisations shouldn't fear this transformation. Digitally active employees will humanise your brand at scale. It will put your employees in front of your logo, celebrating the diversity and skills that differentiate your business. Empower and enable your employees so they have confidence to actively participate in social media conversations and, as this research has shown, it all starts with your social media policy."

Sarah Goodall
CEO - Tribal Impact

Executive Summary

Between October 2019 and October 2020, there was a 12.3% increase in social media usage, according to [GlobalWebIndex](#). 46% of women and 41% of men said they'd spent more time on social media during the pandemic. We surveyed 800 employees in the UK and US to see what their attitudes and behaviours are towards social media.

We wanted to explore this and see how it affected employees' social media usage at work, and their attitude to social media risk. Do employees feel enabled to use social media for – or during – work?

Do employees understand the impact their actions on social media have on their employers? Is this related to their understanding of the social media policy?

Social media provides many opportunities for businesses. It can lead to more business, reinforce existing relationships, and attract new hires. The key is to make sure the business is protected by a social media policy which explains to employees how to use it in a way that benefits the business – and them.

Our findings surprised us...



Our survey showed that employees who have read their company's social media policy are more willing to post positive comments about the company they work for. This boosts their confidence at work, meaning they feel more positive about their working environment – and makes them more likely to share those positive sentiments.

The most significant finding centred around the opportunity that comes with utilising the social media policy as an enablement tool rather than a compliance tool.

We discovered that those who read and understood the policy demonstrated confidence and positive behavioural outcomes as a result.

As organisations learn how to navigate the complexity and sensitivities around the intersection between

employee and employer brand, they should also understand the opportunities that come with such an approach. Whilst the risks are obvious, the opportunities are often underappreciated – a connected organisation leads to quality conversations, extended message reach and market influence in a way that cannot otherwise be created.



Over the next sections, we're going to look at employees' relationship with social media, social media usage during working hours, and social media risk and mitigation.

Our report set out to investigate who uses social media in the workplace and why. We also set out to understand how social media usage is impacted by employee understanding of risk and reputation.

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"With 80% of employees actively using social media and a huge knowledge gap from employees to understand how they can impact company reputation, there is a significant opportunity for brands to facilitate, enable and manage activation"

Tim Williams
CEO - Analytica

Key Findings

- Over 80% of employees are on social media every day – the connectivity opportunity presented to businesses has never been stronger.
- All age groups prioritised 'Taking a mental break from work' as their primary reason for engaging with social media during working hours.
- 42% of those in the 18-34 age bracket have read and not understood, never read, or aren't aware of, the company social media policy.
- 18-24-year-olds are more than twice as likely to post a negative comment/review about their employer online compared to their older colleagues.
- Of those who share information about their company or job on social media each week, 58% said that they don't understand, haven't read, or aren't aware of, a social media policy.
- Nearly a quarter of Executive/C-Level professionals don't believe what they post on social media can impact the reputation of the company they work for.
- Over 50% of 18-24-year-olds either don't believe what they post will impact their employer's reputation or aren't sure. This is the highest of any age group we surveyed.

Employees' Relationship With Social Media

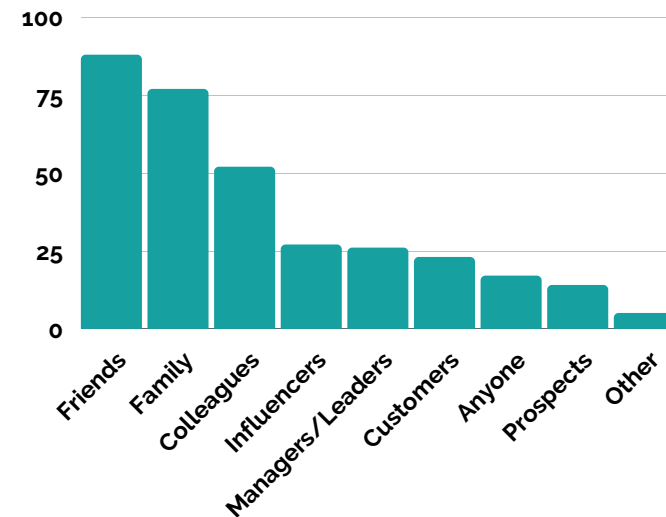
With a 12.3% rise in social media usage between October 2019 and October 2020, it should be no surprise that 83% of people are online daily.

The most popular social media platform is Facebook, which 73% of employees use. Those over 35 are more likely to use Facebook and Instagram than 18-34-year-olds. Younger generations are less likely to use established social media networks like LinkedIn and Twitter, but more likely to be on TikTok, Snapchat, and even the rising audio platform Clubhouse.

82% of those we spoke to said they use social media to

connect with friends, while 77% of people use it to connect with family. These are the two biggest reasons respondents used social media.

Who do you mainly connect with on social media?



Overall, men are more likely to be on social media than women. They're also 42% more likely to use Twitter.

Just 51% of employees use social media to connect with colleagues, while 22% use it to connect with customers. Only 13% of people connect with prospects on any social media platform.

Someone's primary reason for using social media changes depending on their age and gender. Men are 108% more likely to connect with customers on social media than women. They're also 85% more likely to connect with their managers/leaders on social media than their female counterparts.

35-44 year olds are 78% more likely to connect with their colleagues than their 18-24 year old colleagues, and 35-44 year olds are 125% more likely

to connect with their managers and leaders on social media than their 25-34-year-old colleagues.

Over 80% of employees are actively engaging, sharing, and even creating content on social media. This shows a real need for businesses to make their employees aware of how their social media usage impacts their digital footprint and personal brand online, whether they're using it during the working day or outside of working hours.

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Social Media Usage During Working Hours

With 4 out of 5 employees on social media every day, the connectivity opportunity presented to businesses has never been stronger. Our survey results show that businesses aren't taking full advantage of it, though. Or, when they try to, employees don't fully understand what's expected of them.

Usage during the day

All age groups listed 'taking a mental break from work' as their primary reason for engaging with social media during working hours.

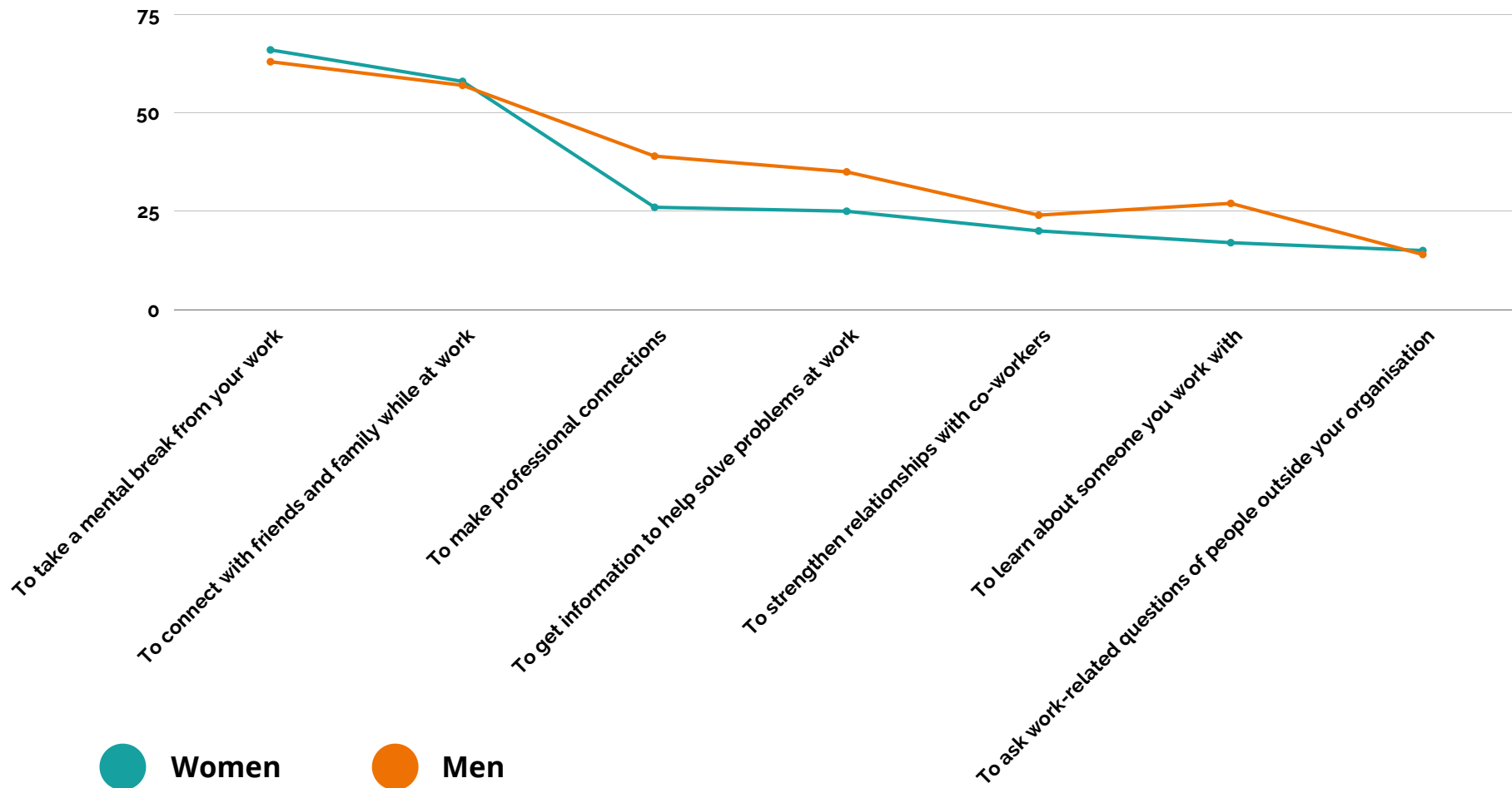
Both the 35-44 and 45-54 age groups are 25% more likely to use social media to make professional connections than their younger counterparts (18-24 and 25-34). They're also more likely to use social media to help solve problems at work than their younger counterparts.

All age groups prioritised 'Taking a mental break from work' as their primary reason for engaging with social media during working hours.

Men are much more likely to use social media professionally, and to get information to solve work problems than women. Employees clearly have different

wants/needs depending on their age, gender and job role, something which is worth considering when developing a social media policy or enablement framework.

Why do you spend time on social media during work hours?



Sharing company content

Employees are most likely to share news about the company's growth, upcoming events, or job postings.

This does differ somewhat by gender, though – men are more likely to share company-focused updates, while women are more focused on sharing content that helps their network.

Older employees are also more likely to share company-focused content, while younger employees share content focusing on helping their network. This suggests that younger employees are more focused on content marketing strategies to build and help their network, while older generations focus on more traditional marketing techniques.

43% of 18-24 year olds and 48% of the 55+ age group either haven't understood their employer's social media policy, haven't read it, or don't think a policy even exists.

Even in the most aware group, (35-44 year olds) 1/3 of respondents said they haven't read or understood the company policy.

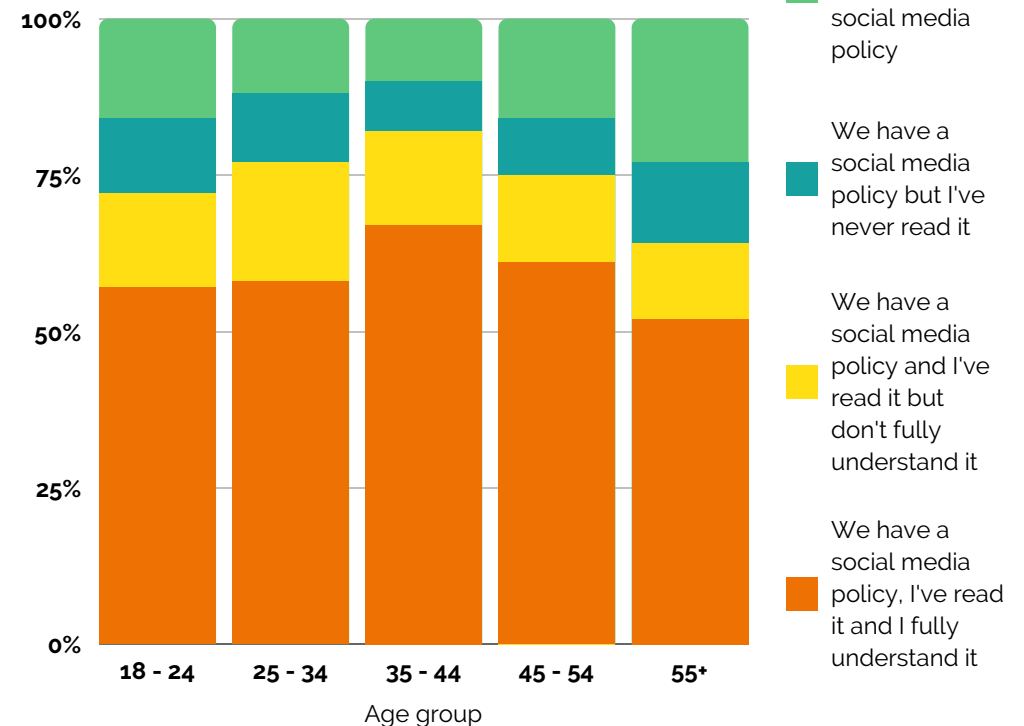
Social Media Risk And Mitigation

42% of those in the 18-34 age bracket, have read and not understood, never read, or aren't aware of, their company's social media policy. That's a big knowledge gap for the age ranges most likely to be on social media on a daily basis.

48% of those in the 55+ age bracket have also either not understood, never read, or aren't aware of, the company's social media policy.

This shows that under 35s and over 55s are just as likely to not understand, or not be aware of a social media policy.

Which of these statements best describes your understanding of your company's social media policy?



It's interesting that those who've grown up with social media, and those who grew up before it, are the audiences who struggle the most to understand its impact on business. This could be because neither age group has yet to witness the long-term consequences of social media usage either by not using it at all, or not in a professional environment.

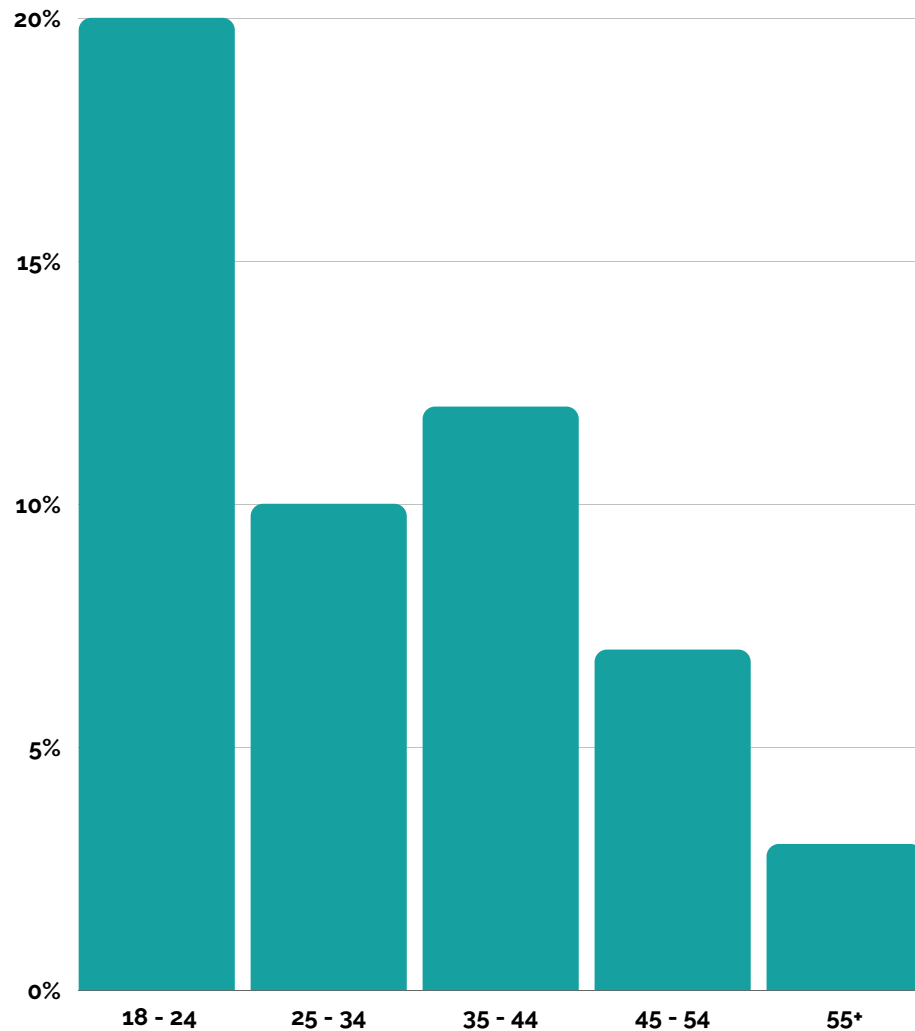
Positive and negative comments about the company

There will always be those who use social media to complain, but with 51% of employees who've posted a negative comment not having read the social media policy, not understanding it, or being unaware of a policy, it raises the question of how this changes based on social media policy usage. Especially when you consider that 72% of the people who've posted a positive comment/review about their employer online have read and fully understood their company's policy.

20% of 18-24-year-olds said they had posted a negative comment or review – publicly – about their employer, compared to just 3% of the 55+ age group. This 18-24 demographic is also less likely to have read, understood, or be aware of a social media policy.

The 18-24 age range are more than twice as likely to post a negative comment/review about their employer online compared to their older colleagues.

I have posted a negative comment/review about my employer online



Of those who have said something negative about their employer, 49% either haven't read the social media policy, don't understand it, or aren't aware of one.

50% of the 18-24 age range also don't believe what they post will impact their employer's reputation or aren't sure – that's the highest of any age group. Employees in the 35-44 age range are most likely to post a positive comment or review about their employer.

Sharing and social media policies

Of those who share information about their company or job on social media each week, 58% said they don't understand, haven't read, or aren't aware of, a social media policy. Of those who share daily, 74% said they have read and fully understand the company's social media policy.

58% of people who share information about their company each week don't understand, haven't read, or aren't aware of, a social media policy.



"The opportunities that result from building a strong presence on social channels far outweigh the risks. Leaving the playing field to your competitors for them to engage with your clients or prospects is far too great a price to pay."

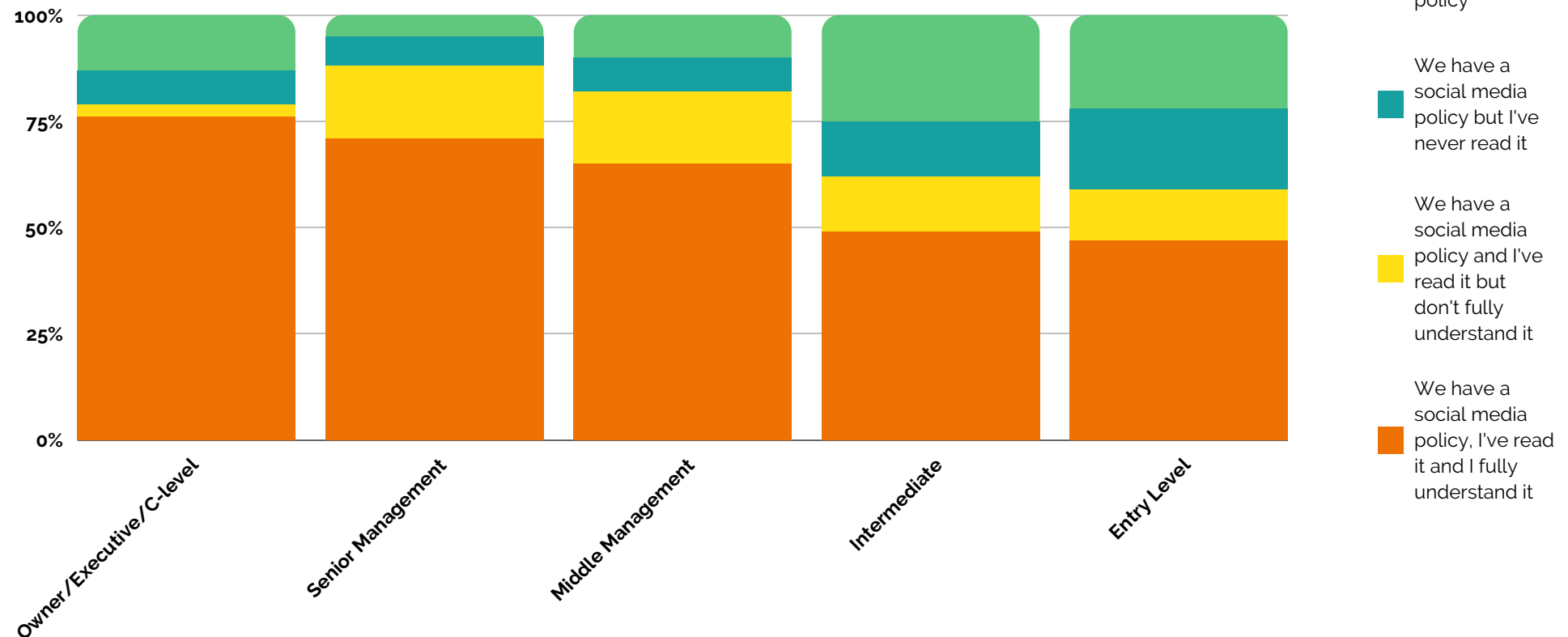
David Perry - @SocialDave
Global Social Media Advisor
WSP

Influence of social media on the business

Junior staff are less likely to have understood the social media policy, yet this is the very group who are more likely to criticise the company.

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Which of these statements best describes your understand of your company's social media policy?



Over half of junior employees (51% of intermediate and 52% of entry level) have either read and not understood, not read, or are unaware of, a social media policy.

Senior staff are more aware of a social media policy, which could suggest that junior employees aren't being informed of the policy or assume understanding of the risks because they natively use the platforms.

46% of entry-level employees either don't believe, or aren't sure that what they post on social media can impact the reputation of the company they work for.

But it's not just entry-level employees who believe this. Surprisingly, nearly a quarter of Executive/C-level professionals don't believe that what they post on social media can impact the reputation of the company they work for.

This shows a huge knowledge gap. It's particularly concerning that Executive/C-level professionals don't understand the impact it could have on the brand, as employees follow the examples set by their senior leadership. If those higher up the ladder use social media correctly, this could positively impact the effectiveness of company-wide usage.



"Organisations need to recognise that employees are already using social media to connect with friends and family. And they're probably already talking about the company or sharing content. The risks are already there. Help employees build their awareness through training and utilise internal-only social media networks (ESNs) as a confidence building tool before they engage externally."

Keith Lewis
Social Media Manager
Zurich Insurance UK

Conclusion

Social media policies have traditionally been written with one objective in mind: to protect the brand online. For this reason, they're often drafted by compliance or legal offices.

The problem is, employees don't fully understand legalese, which could be why many who responded to our research had read the policy but not fully understood it, or not read it at all. Social media platforms have realised this and have started simplifying their terms and conditions as a result. The paragraphs are shorter, and the language is easier to understand, meaning users know what they're signing up for when they create an account.

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The social media policy is changing. It's no longer just a document that needs to be signed to protect the reputation of the business. As history has shown us, when a policy is enforced, it opens the brand up to unprecedented and often uninvited coverage... on social media!

Our research has shown us that a social media policy serves a much higher purpose.

These policies are the first time an employee will engage with a document from your brand about social media. It can either scare them off or encourage them – all while mitigating the risks that come with encouraging employees to be active on social media.

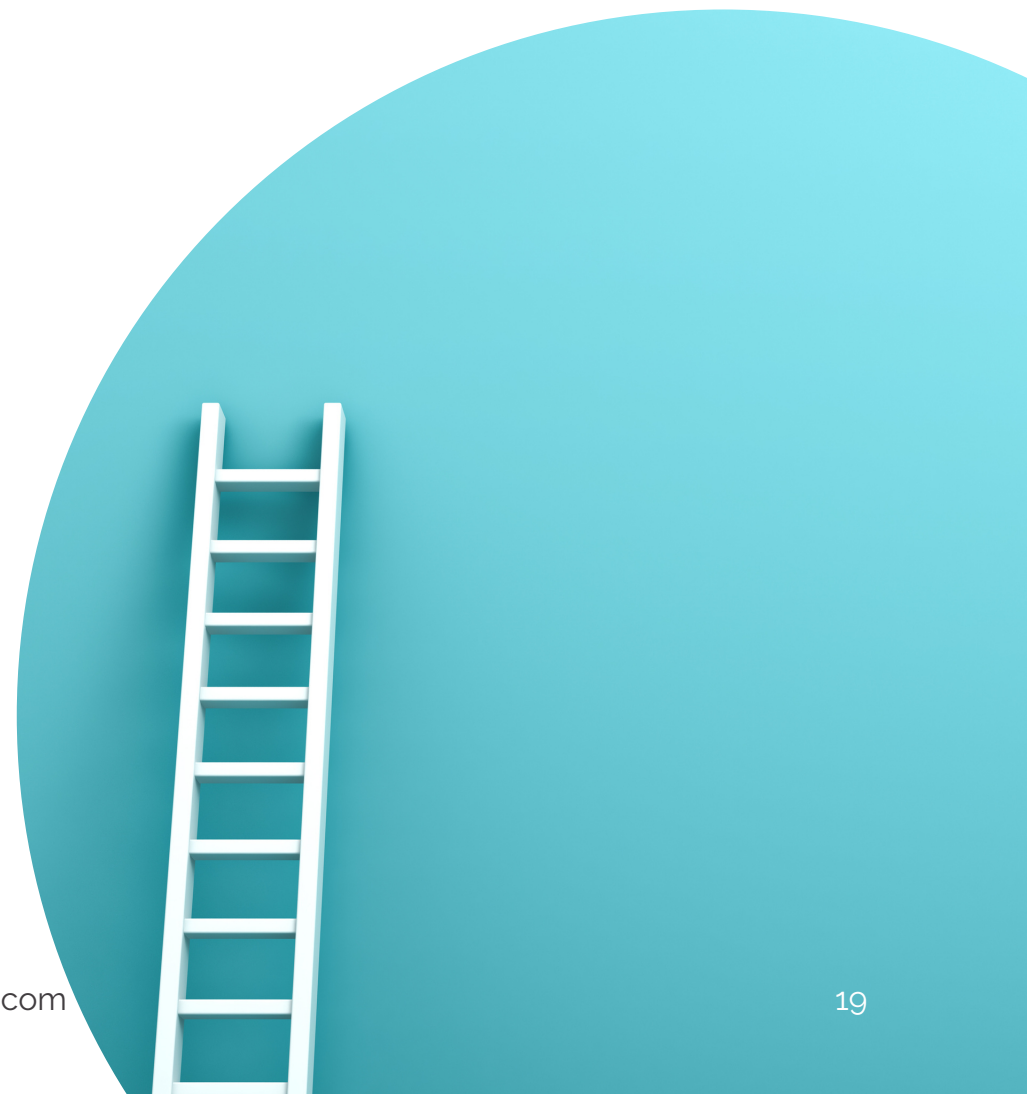


An effective policy should talk as much about the opportunities that social media presents as the risks, including scenarios to help employees contextualise the lessons they're learning.

It should also show examples of when social media usage goes right and when it goes wrong, being mindful of cultural differences.

When all done correctly, it can bring positive outcomes for the business and the employee.

The greater an employee's understanding of a company's social media policy and guidelines, the more confident they are to talk positively about their employer – both directly to others, and publicly on social media.



The impact this has on employer branding, talent acquisition, and employee happiness is something that has been previously researched by [Jobvite](#). They found that:

- Employee referrals can reduce time to hire by 40%.
- Employee referrals only make up about 7% of potential candidates, but these referrals are the most beneficial for employers. While the percentages of employee referrals are low, their conversion rates are nearly 40%.
- 46% of employee referrals stay at their position past a year.
- About 51% of employers saw [less recruiting costs with employee referrals](#).

When employees talk positively about their employer online, it can hugely impact the employer brand. This leads to more suitable job applicants, and a decreased time to hire.



But that's not all – it can also impact how sales teams deepen relationships with their customers; how technical experts can connect with other experts and influencers around the world, and enable service service technicians to better understand their customer's issues.

Brands who put more thought into their social media policy, and not just use it as a legal document to discipline employees with, will see the positive impact on their digital brand presence.

Ensure your social media policy is written in a way that's easy for everyone to understand. Employees will then be more mindful of the guidelines and talk more positively about their employer.

Use the social media policy as an enablement step. The first step employees take in becoming ambassadors for your brand online – creating a learning journey for them to progress as far as they're comfortable doing so.



"Nearly every brand today has employees who are active on social media and talk about their brand on their social platforms. Employees engage on social media for different reasons. Brands that recognise this and build the competitive advantages of socially engaged employees encounter internal and external challenges, including potential conflict between brand goals and the employees' personal goals for their own professional reputations. Often, those two sets of goals may not align completely, and it takes some effort for the brand to keep it working together. Brands need to respect the employee's desire to develop their own reputation—or the reputation that they may already have—as the greatest impact occurs when both the brand and the employee understand and integrate each other's strategies and plans."

Susan Emerick,
Author, The Most Powerful Brand on
Earth and Digital Strategies: Data-driven
PR, Marketing and Advertising

Respondant Data

Employees surveyed:

- **800 Employees**

Their genders:

- **Female 41%**
- **Male - 59%**

Industries they work in:

- **Manufacturing 21%**
- **Telecommunications 15%**
- **Software 64%**

Their age groups:

- **18 - 24: 13%**
- **25 - 34: 22%**
- **35 - 44: 36%**
- **45 - 54: 18%**
- **55+: 11%**

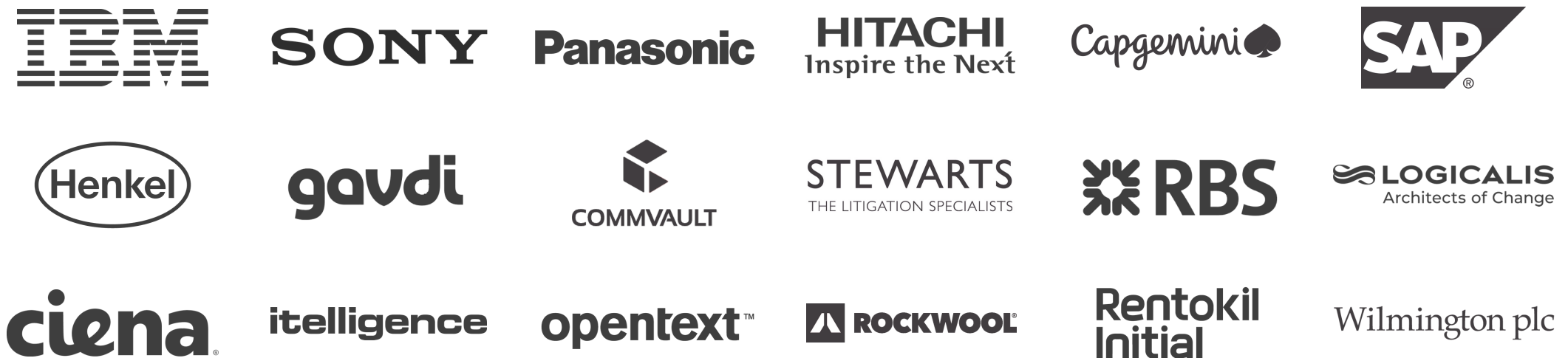
Employee roles:

- **Technical Staff 16%**
- **Product Manager 4%**
- **Project Manager 4%**
- **Supervisor 6%**
- **Admin/Clerical 11%**
- **Buyer/Purchasing Agent 2%**
- **Sales Staff 7%**
- **HR Manager 4%**
- **Senior Management 18%**
- **Director 6%**
- **Middle Management 22%**



Tribal Impact specialises in social media advocacy. We work with B2B organisations that are frustrated because they can no longer cut through the digital noise to reach their audience. We do this by helping them join the dots between Social Selling, Social Media Marketing and Employee Advocacy.

Creating impact with...



Activating your employees on social media can be an exciting, but daunting task. Especially because of the risk involved, but where there's risk there's opportunity! If you need help with your social media policy or activating employees on social media, get in touch!

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