

Navigating the Digital Landscape: Social Media and Employee Privacy in Nepalese Service Sector

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Article Info

Abstract

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Keywords: *Sharing personal information; Monitoring and Surveillance; Limiting off-duty online activities; and employee privacy.*

This study employs a descriptive and causal research design to investigate the impact of social media on employee privacy in Nepalese service sector organizations, using primary data gathered through surveys. With a sample size of 200 employees in Kathmandu Valley, the research reveals that monitoring and controlling online activities significantly affect employee privacy, followed by limitations on off-duty online activities. Sharing personal information also emerges as a contributing factor. The study underscores the importance of balanced organizational policies that uphold employee privacy rights while harnessing the advantages of social media. These findings highlight the need for organizations to adopt clear guidelines to protect employee privacy in the digital age.

Introduction

The Internet, a pivotal invention of our era, has reshaped global communication and information exchange, prompting businesses to redefine strategies. Social media, a product of this revolution, presents new challenges and opportunities in marketing (Hebblewhite, 2012; Wushe & Shenje, 2019). Social media's explosive rise in popularity in recent years has altered how workers network and share information, which has both good and bad effects on the employer-employee dynamic. Social media is a new channel of communication that offers companies and employees a plethora of perks and opportunities. Additionally, it provides a place for staff members to voice out more swiftly and powerfully, whether they are disparaging their employers or their coworkers. The emergence of internal social media platforms/applications creates opportunities for organizations to promote collaboration between employees and improve employee engagement (Haddud et al., 2016).

Moreover, the prevalence of employees using social network sites (SNS) at the workplace raises questions about its impact on work dynamics and privacy concerns. While privacy has been a hot topic in online social network research, but little has been done to investigate its specific implications within workplace contexts (Wang & Kobsa, 2012). Organizations must navigate this landscape carefully, as social media's rapid eclipse of other communication forms necessitates keeping pace with these changes (Ryan et al., 2017). Establishing clear internal policies and controls becomes crucial in order to lessen the dangers of using social media at work, ensuring that boundaries are set to prevent potential legal issues or reputational damage (Drury, 2008). Thus, while social media offers avenues for enhanced communication and collaboration, its unchecked use poses significant challenges that demand strategic management and oversight from organizations.

The Internet has become indispensable, shaping personal and professional lives (Wang & Kobsa, 2012). Social media is an integral part of relationships (Traister, 2018). The blurred line between personal and professional spheres raises issues.

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This study explores how social media sites such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook impact employer-employee relationships, focusing on professional judgment, privacy, and freedom of speech. The study's research issue was about the factors that affect employee privacy in Nepalese service sector organizations. The study's main goal was to examine concerns about social media and employee privacy in Nepalese service sector firms.

The study has several limitations. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires, relying on respondents' understanding. The research is probably confined to available literature and observations for its theoretical aspects. Additionally, there is a geographic limitation, as the survey was conducted only among social media-active customers residing in the Kathmandu Valley. Primary data were collected.

Literature Review

The emergence of Web 2.0 has enhanced online interconnectivity, facilitating collaboration between consumers and businesses (Fuller et al., 2006). Social media, a key communication tool, enables widespread interaction, content sharing, and instant communication (Dryer, 2010; Cox & Rethman, 2011a). It is now integral to organizations, affecting work dynamics and raising data privacy concerns (Jacobsen & Forste, 2010; Bennett, 2009; Wang & Kobsa, 2012). Legal implications have emerged, prompting new laws to protect employees' social media use and privacy (Smith et al., 2021).

Social media are computer-mediated tools that enable the development and exchange of ideas, content, and other kinds of expression through online networks and communities. Sinclair and Vogus (2011) describe it as software tools for user-generated content sharing, while Cox (2010) emphasizes necessary features like user profiles, content, and connectivity. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) highlight the unique aspect of social media, which allows users to create personal profiles and connect with others. Originating in 1987 with Bulletin Board Systems, social media evolved to influence consumer behavior significantly (Evans, 2008). According to Parr (2009), it is an online application that is founded on Web 2.0 concepts and facilitates the development and exchange of user-generated content. It is a platform for effectively sharing experiences and information.

Social media, propelled by Web 2.0, has become integral to daily life globally, offering participation, conversation, connectedness, and community as its defining characteristics. Understanding these is crucial for individuals navigating personal marketing, job searching, and product information and for brands implementing successful marketing strategies (Mayfield, 2008; Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). Social media platforms enable extensive information sharing and content generation online. They are categorized into seven main types: social networks, blogs, wikis, podcasts, content communities, forums, and microblogging. These platforms facilitate relationship-building and networking across various functionalities (Mayfield, 2008; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Workplace privacy is a contentious issue, and employees must often sacrifice some privacy rights at work (Sproule, 2002). Employers see this monitoring as necessary to prevent misconduct and limit liability (Chieh, 2003), but it can lead to negative effects such as increased stress, lowered morale, and reduced motivation (Ford & Ludlum, 2016). Privacy rights are protected by various legal standards (August et al., 2001), but the extent of these protections is debated, especially regarding monitoring beyond the workplace (Sproule, 2002; Chieh, 2003; Ford & Ludlum, 2016).

Social media facilitates connections and understanding between employees and employers, often extending into personal lives. It allows organizations to onboard new employees and enhance organizational commitment (Gonzalez et al., 2013). Research indicates a growing use of social media and other ICTs, yet many companies lack a formal social media policy, with only about half of American companies having such policies, often restricting social media use at work (Pew Research, n.d.). Internal social media platforms are emerging as tools to foster collaboration and improve employee engagement. They offer employees a convenient way to share personal and professional information. However, research on their potential to enhance organizational performance remains limited (Haddud et al., 2016).

By promoting employment opportunities, finding individuals, and checking background information, social media platforms can be quite helpful in the recruitment process (Zhao et al., 2012). They also serve as effective tools for using media to spread the word about corporate values and employee events to promote the employer brand, attracting applicants and customers (Gallagher, 2015). In addition to external uses, social media platforms are valuable for delivering internal communications such as HR policies, benefits information, company news, and professional development opportunities (Jackson, 2012). Internal social networking platforms promote employee engagement by providing a more engaging environment than traditional email, allowing for greater participation and empowerment (Haddud et al., 2016). They facilitate social learning and knowledge sharing among employees, which can improve problem-solving and increase productivity (Chui et al., 2012).

Furthermore, during disasters or emergencies, social media platforms enable employers to communicate quickly and effectively with displaced employees (Yarow, 2012). For HR professionals, social media provides opportunities for professional networking, keeping pace with industry trends, and attracting Clients whose values are consistent with the employer brand (Smith et al., 2021). Moreover, internal social media platforms offer valuable data analysis capabilities, helping employers identify skills, trends, and employee sentiment to shape internal programs and goals (Gill et al., 2016).

Using social media on company networks raises concerns about security, including the risks of hacks, viruses, and privacy breaches (Mishra & Singh, 2013). There is also the potential for social media to be misused for harassment or bullying among employees, requiring HR intervention (Stoughton et al., 2013). Another risk is negative exposure, which can be caused by postings by current or former employees or clients that harm the employer's reputation. Furthermore, social media use in the workplace can cause legal concerns, such as discrimination claims, privacy violations, and conflicts with employees' rights (NLRB, 2012). Employers also face challenges in managing productivity, as some employees may spend excessive work hours on personal social media use, necessitating clear policies and guidelines (Jackson, 2012).

Employees use social media for personal and work activities, blurring lines and causing potential conflicts when they clash with employer expectations (Sprague, 2011). Without a social media policy, both parties face risks, such as discrimination claims from using personal information found online (Bhave, 2014). Privacy laws cover discrimination, free speech, labor activities, and account access, varying by region (Greenwald, 2012). Employers should respect privacy, avoid compelling passwords, and manage risks by implementing clear social media policies (Broughton et al., 2010). Monitoring should be designated and compliant with local laws to balance privacy and company interests (Sprague, 2011).

Wang and Kobsa (2012) found that while SNS use is becoming more common in the workplace, its effects must still be carefully investigated. Since many executives believe that social media use in the workplace kills productivity, social media control has become a top management concern (Skeels & Grudin, 2009).

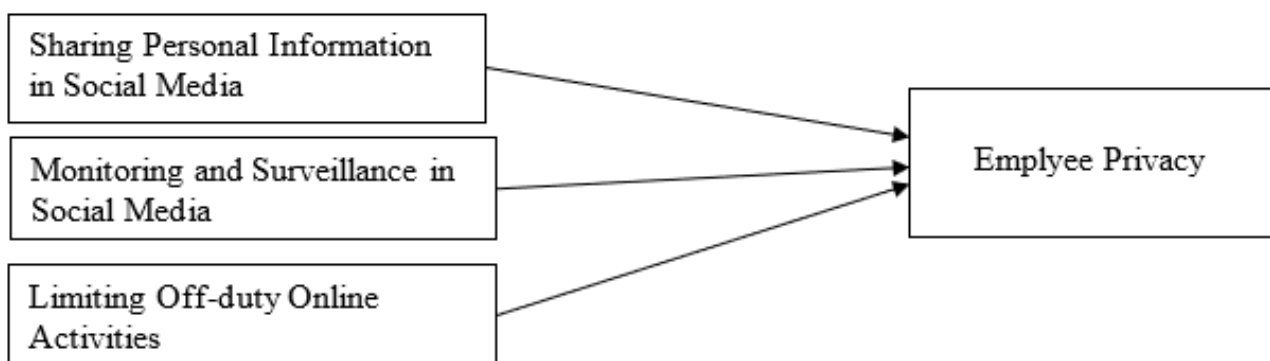
Businesses should make an effort to have clear policies and procedures and to explain them to staff members so they may sign a form attesting to their awareness of them (Bennett, 2010a). In order to prevent legal disputes that may occur when managers attempt to regulate employees' usage of social media, it is crucial to have a formal policy that is signed by the employee admitting the information on it (Bennett, 2010b). Moreover, Cox and Rethman (2011b) suggested that companies give careful thought to stipulating social media usage in employee contracts.

Figure1

Conceptual Framework

Independent variable

Dependent variable



Source: Abril et al. (2012); Mello (2012); Skjaerstad and Ersdal (2016)

Research Hypothesis

To find which factors affect employee privacy, the following alternative hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Sharing personal information in social media has a significant impact on the invasion of employee privacy.
- H2: Monitoring and surveillance in social media have a significant impact on the invasion of privacy.
- H3: Limiting off-duty online activities has a significant impact on the invasion of employee privacy.

Research Methods

A descriptive and causal research design was employed, with findings based on a primary survey. Data were collected via a self-administered questionnaire supplemented by expert opinions. The study's population comprised employees within the Kathmandu Valley who were familiar with social media. The sample was selected to include respondents who were well aware of social media and working for at least a year in service organizations. The sample frame was taken as IT companies and the hospitality sector in Nepal. Two hundred samples were finalized and valid for analysis purposes.

The structured questionnaire covers demographics, sharing personal information, monitoring and surveillance, limiting off-duty online activities, and employee privacy, including 5-point Likert scale questions. Primary data collection involved a survey questionnaire method, using delivery and collection to ensure completeness and address respondent confusion, thereby increasing accuracy. The questionnaires, targeting employees who are active on social media, were collected online.

Following data collection, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were used to evaluate and interpret the results. Microsoft Excel 2019 and SPSS 23 were utilized to examine the information gathered.

The gender distribution of respondents indicates that male participation was higher than female participation within the sample. Specifically, 43% of the respondents were female, while 57% were male. The age distribution of respondents shows that 5% were below 20 years old, 77% were between 20-30 years old, 16% were between 30-40 years, and so on.

Most of the respondents in this study had higher educational qualifications, with 40% holding Bachelor's degrees and 54% having Master's degrees or above. Only a small percentage, 5%, had completed Intermediate education, while 1% of the respondents had education below SEE. This distribution indicates a well-educated sample.

Facebook is the most used social media platform among respondents (24%), followed by YouTube (21%) and Viber (17%). Instagram (16%) and WhatsApp (11%) are also popular, while LinkedIn (6%) and Twitter (5%) have lower usage rates.

Results and Discussion

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's Alpha method was utilized to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire's constructs. A Cronbach's Alpha value greater than 0.7, by statistical standards, denotes adequate reliability (Nunnally, 1978; Sekaran, 2000). Table 1 provides specific details regarding the reliability test findings.

Table 1

Reliability Analysis

Code	Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
SI	Sharing personal information in social media	0.783	5
	Monitoring and surveillance in social media		5
MOS	Limiting off-duty online activities	0.778	5
LOA	Employee privacy	0.721	5
EMP		0.754	5

Table 1 highlights that Cronbach's Alpha values for each construct exceeded the threshold of 0.7, suggesting that the constructs are reliable.

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are used to summarize the data. Mean and standard deviation is used to measure the average and variation in the data. It is explained in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

Code	Constructs	M	SD
ESI	Sharing personal information on social media	3.45	.46
	Monitoring and surveillance in social media		.94
MOS	Limiting off-duty online activities	3.67	.92
LOA	Employee privacy	3.88	.96
EMP		3.55	

Table 2 shows respondents' perceptions across several constructs measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) show that respondents are moderately inclined toward sharing personal information on social media (M = 3.45, SD = 0.46), indicating a balanced perspective on what they are willing to disclose in professional settings. Concerns about monitoring and surveillance in social media are somewhat higher (M = 3.67, SD = 0.94), suggesting a significant level of apprehension about privacy invasion through electronic surveillance. Respondents also show a stronger inclination towards supporting limitations on off-duty online activities (M = 3.88, SD = 0.92), possibly to protect their privacy or maintain a professional image. The perception of employee privacy receives a moderate score (M = 3.55, SD = 0.96), indicating a nuanced understanding of privacy challenges posed by social media in the workplace. It highlights the complexities of managing privacy in the era of social media and suggests areas where organizations may need to focus their efforts to balance employee privacy and organizational security.

Correlation Analysis

Correlations among variables were analyzed using Pearson's correlation coefficient to assess relationships. The correlation matrix revealed positive relationships where variables increased together and negative relationships where one decreased as the other increased. Correlations were categorized as weak ($r < 0.30$), moderate ($0.30 < r < 0.60$), or strong ($r > 0.60$) (Levin & Fox, 2006).

Table 3

Correlation Matrix

		Employee Privacy
Employee Privacy	Correlation	1
	Sig.	
Sharing Personal Information in Social Media	Correlation	.176
	Sig.	.014
Monitoring and Surveillance in Social Media	Correlation	.358
	Sig.	.000
Limiting Off-duty Online Activities	Correlation	.388
	Sig.	.000

Table 3 shows a weak positive correlation between employee privacy and sharing personal information on social media ($r = 0.176$, $p = 0.014$) (Levin & Fox, 2006). Additionally, there is a moderate positive correlation between employee privacy and monitoring and surveillance in social media ($r = 0.358$, $p = 0.000$) (Levin & Fox, 2006), as well as between employee privacy and limiting off-duty online activities ($r = 0.388$, $p = 0.000$) (Levin & Fox, 2006). These findings suggest that as monitoring, surveillance, and restrictions on off-duty online activities increase, employees' perceptions of privacy at work also tend to increase, though varying degrees.

Regression Analysis

Regression analysis measures the impact of predictors on predictant. It is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Regression Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized coefficients B	Standardized Coefficients Beta	T	Sig.
(Constant)	6.762		3.498	0.001
Sharing Personal Information on Social Media	0.152	0.135	2.113	0.036
Monitoring and Surveillance in Social Media	0.205	0.259	3.198	0.000
Limiting Off-duty Online Activities	0.300	0.315	4.794	0.000

R = .523, *R-square* = .536; *Adjusted r-square* = .338; *Std. Error of Estimate* = 5.83; *F-value* = 18.88; *df* = 3,196; *Sig.* = 0.000.

Table 4 shows the model's overall fit, where R indicates 0.523, showing a moderate correlation between the predictors and the dependent variable. R-square: 0.536, meaning the predictors explain approximately 53.6% of the variance in employee privacy (Levin & Fox, 2006). Adjusted R-square: 0.338, adjusting for the number of predictors. Standard Error of Estimate: 5.83, indicating the average distance between the observed and predicted values. F-value: 18.88 with *df* = 3,196, and *Sig.* = 0.000, they indicate that the overall regression model is statistically significant.

Table 4 shows the regression analysis results of the relationship between employee privacy and three predictors: sharing personal information on social media, monitoring and surveillance, and limiting off-duty online activities.

Constant: The intercept value is 6.762, indicating the predicted value of employee privacy when all predictors are zero. Sharing Personal Information in Social Media: The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 0.152, and the standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.135. This significant predictor (*t* = 2.113, *p* = 0.036) suggests a positive but modest effect on employee privacy.

Monitoring and Surveillance on Social Media: The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 0.205, and the standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.259. This predictor is significant (*t* = 3.198, *p* = 0.000), indicating a moderately positive effect on employee privacy. Limiting Off-Duty Online Activities: The unstandardized coefficient (B) is 0.300, and the standardized coefficient (Beta) is 0.315. This significant predictor (*t* = 4.794, *p* = 0.000) shows a substantial positive effect on employee privacy.

Discussion

This research indicates that limiting off-duty online activities; and monitoring and surveillance of social media usage are the most significant drivers impacting employee privacy, followed by sharing personal information on social media. These findings align with Abril et al. (2012), who also identified monitoring and controlling as primary factors affecting employee privacy. Similarly, Skjaerstad and Ersdal (2016) found that sharing personal information is a significant driver of employee privacy concerns, highlighting that while respondents understand tracking mechanisms online, they are only moderately informed about potential privacy issues related to sharing information on social networking sites.

Despite their openness in sharing personal information online, employees maintain a strong expectation of network privacy and react negatively to sharing with unintended audiences. This expectation of privacy is critical in the workplace, where employees expect their online activities, especially those conducted off-duty, to remain private. Abril et al. (2012) highlight that employees are judged across contexts and seek to control how distinct audiences perceive their online identities. This desire for audience segregation aligns with Goffman's (1959) observations on identity performance, where individuals manage their presentations differently based on the social context. However, the current legal and technological frameworks do not fully support these privacy expectations, leading to a disconnect between what Millennials expect and what is legally and technically feasible (Abril et al., 2012). This gap underscores the need for employers to develop policies that respect employees' privacy while balancing organizational needs.

These findings are consistent with Mello (2012), who concluded that while social networking has become an essential means of communication and business promotion, there is still a lack of comprehensive laws addressing employer monitoring of social networking sites. Until such laws are developed, employees must exercise discretion with their online posts, recognizing the long-term implications of their digital activities.

Conclusion

This study has shown that monitoring and controlling social media usage significantly affects employee privacy in Nepalese service sector organizations. Despite their transparency online, Millennials strongly emphasize network privacy and control over personal information. This tension between organizational monitoring and employee privacy expectations underscores the importance of balanced policies. Organizations need to develop comprehensive frameworks that respect privacy rights while leveraging the benefits of social media for business purposes.

Implications for Nepalese Service Sectors

For Nepalese service sector organizations, the findings highlight several key implications. First, organizations need to establish clear and transparent social media policies that balance employee privacy concerns with organizational needs for monitoring and controlling online activities. Such policies should be regularly updated to keep pace with changing technologies and legal landscapes.

Second, training programs should be implemented to educate employees about the risks of online sharing of personal information and the importance of maintaining privacy in a digital age. This can help mitigate potential legal risks and enhance employee awareness.

Lastly, organizations should consider adopting technologies and tools that facilitate secure and private communication channels, ensuring that sensitive information remains protected. By addressing these issues proactively, Nepalese service sector organizations can foster a culture of trust and respect while harnessing the benefits of social media for business growth and employee engagement.

Further research

Adapting policies to evolving technological and social norms is needed to ensure a secure and supportive work environment. Organizations can foster trust and transparency by addressing these issues while protecting employee privacy. It is essential to continue studying these dynamics to keep policies up-to-date and to maintain a healthy and productive work environment.

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