

Digital Skills and Research Methods

Module Name: **Digital Skills and Research**

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Introduction

In this document, certain aspects of digital aspects and research methods were investigated. The assignment is structured in three distinct parts.

The first part focuses on the investigation of two modern technologies that aims to ease the workplace environment and to make people more efficient. The first technological area studied were Cloud storage solutions and the second one, business conference applications. Also based on the available comparisons, we can draw some conclusions and recommendations.

The second part of this study focuses on social media and the impact in our life, more specifically targeted around Facebook.

Concluding, the last part is centered around online presence on our current society.

Assessing effectiveness of modern technologies

Technology 1 (Cloud storage solutions)

Cloud storage represents a service offered to you as a customer or a business, to store various data inside the cloud (companies servers) for an amount of money paid either monthly for traffic or for space occupied within the cloud.

In everyday jobs in the workplace, cloud storage technologies offers multiple benefits:

- **Cost effectiveness** - Instead of the company investing in cupboard for storing actual documents, files or any other type of data, or servers for making their own digital storage solution, cloud storage offers usually a flat fee for any kind of data.
- **Simplicity in use** - Due to improvements in User Interfaces (UI), cloud solutions became so easy to use that no matter the age, you can get a good grasp of it in a few minutes
- **Access to data from anywhere** - Instead of having the need to be physically there to retrieve some data or documents like in a traditional scenario, storing the data in the cloud offers you instant access to your files from anywhere in the world.
- **Security** - If you are working with sensitive data and you need an elevated level of security, rather than investing in expensive security solutions, using a cloud service deals with that for you.

Analysis scope

For the purpose of analysis, the main two cloud storage providers broadly used currently are **Google Drive** developed by Google Corporation and **OneDrive** developed by Microsoft Corporation. Therefore those will be subject to our analysis. Both of them offer robust, fast, flexible and secure solutions for any type of usage no matter the scope.

Both of the providers offers the following:

- **Robustness** - they accept any files no matter the extension. Most of the file can be opened in web views UI's.
- **Speed** - fast retrieval of any file from your account only depending on your connection latency
- **Flexibility** - Due to their advanced UI's you no longer need to be on a computer to edit files and share them. Their UI's work on virtually any device.
- **Security** - Both of them offers some levels of encryption (OneDrive dependant on customer tier)

Google Drive vs OneDrive (Differences)

Analysed area	Google Drive	Microsoft OneDrive
Security	Very strong AES 128-bit while in motion encryption for every user and every file	No encryption unless you have a business account
Customer support	Premium customer support and 2 hours query response time if you buy the paid version of Google Drive (100 gb/month)	No premium customer support specifically designed for OneDrive. Support achieved through Microsoft account support.
Ease of use	Easy to grasp UI. Direct access from Google Search, Drag and Drop support, Accessibility built-in features in most of the products within Google Drive.	UI heavy reliant on Microsoft Outlook. No direct access from the Microsoft account. Slightly confusing file structures depending on what application you have opened.
Customer base	As of July 2018, the Google drive web application is used by 1 billion people.	As of 10 August 2017, OneDrive had 115 million users
Family account support	Yes, via shared folders	Yes, via family account
Integrations	Google Drive offers integrations with all the Google Office products like Google Sheets, Google Docs, etc	OneDrive has integrations with Microsoft Office online solutions like Microsoft Word, Delve, Outlook
Sync	Cross platform file synchronization applications. Also can be tweaked for performance or reliability by increasing allocated bandwidth	Windows 10 only synchronization application.

Also in terms of value for money is worth mentioning that online UI's such as Microsoft Word or Microsoft Excel, are paid service in OneDrive context while Google UI's like Docs, Sheets etc are all free.

Recommendations

The cloud providers recommendations will be structured based on user scope.

Normal user (Winner: **Google Drive**)

For a normal user that just wants to save a few photos now and then and to keep track of his receipts, documents etc, Google Drive clearly wins on several aspects like Ease of Use, out of the box encryption and free editors for various types of data.

Small organization (Winner: **Google Drive**)

Similar to the normal user, small organisations most of the time want to maximize their profits in order to grow, therefore since Google Drive offers more services for free and more free gigabytes (5 in OneDrive, 15 in Google Drive), it clearly wins this type of customer as well.

Large organization (Winner: **Microsoft OneDrive**)

Even that Microsoft OneDrive comes with a hefty price, for large organizations (200+ employees), usually resilience, robustness and shareability are more important and worth paying a premium for them. Also OneDrive offers data replication in multiple nodes across multiple regions if the resilience of your data is the top priority. OneDrive can be further integrated with Microsoft Outlook which is one of the most popular mail technologies for businesses.

Exploring social media as a tool for marketing

Overview

For this investigation there were taken into considerations the most popular three social media sites available at the moment in the UK. Those were:

- **Facebook** - 2.23 billion users
- **Youtube** - 1.9 billion users
- **Instagram** - 1 billion users

Based on the above criteria, the chosen network was **Facebook**. This is the leading social media network by number of users, by engagement rates and by time spent on it (Facebook videos). Also since in it has more than 60 million business pages, advertising on Facebook seems a very safe deal for any marketing department in any company.

Strategy stages

Any company when it starts its social media advertising journey it will need to set up several stages in their strategy such as:

Aiming for a goal - as a first step any organization needs to establish a realistic goal and deadlines for achieving it. The goal which is set up will heavily shape the rest of the marketing plan, budget, methods and audience research.

Researching their target audience - In order to broaden the awareness about the company, a product or a service on social media, companies need to find their needed audience, to start forming groups of people on key demographic criteria and to start building on top of that content specifically targeted at them.

Managing the marketing budget for that platform - marketing on social media platforms costs are usually established by the niche in which your company operates, competitors and population interested in that niche. For instance if a company is battling another 500 competitors on 100 users, the cost to market their products will be exorbitant while if an organization is battling another 2 competitors on 5 million users, is fairly easy for the social network to advertise the content to a lot of people, therefore the cost will be minimal.

Creating social media friendly content - content designed for social media, is very different from content designed for web sites, newspapers, magazines, blogs etc. Due to limitations and the rules of the platform, the size of the ads, the contents of the paragraphs, colour schemes and the overall aesthetics are restrained. Failing to respect the platform guidelines may result in a ban on that platform which is highly undesirable for any company. Usually organizations hire marketing professionals with specific skills on the targeted platform.

Monitoring engagements - Finally, the whole marketing mechanism is an iterative process. Everything should be monitored, assessed and improved. Also entire marketing campaigns should be compared from time to time between them and decide which performs better and which ones are underperforming.

Gathering user metrics and informations on Facebook

Nowadays there are lots of ways to gather metrics and useful insights about your audience on the social media platforms. Usually there are two main ways to gather this data. The big companies in the world usually employ both paths for more accurate ad strategies tracking and for assessing their progress in marketing campaigns.

The methods are:

- **Via Facebook Insights** - this method doesn't require any technical knowledge whatsoever, is available out of the box for any Facebook campaign which is launched. It is somehow limited by the fact that the reports developed by Facebook inc are not offering an exhaustive view of your audience. This is usually best suited and the only method used by small and medium sized organizations.
- **Via web automated scrapers** - this method require some technical knowledge. Web scrapers are going through all your posts and re-gather all the data for you on which a team of data analyst then can slice and dice and produce more meaningful, granular reports. This is usually used by large organizations like: Google, Coca-Cola HBC, Lloyds and so on.

Facebook Insights

Facebook insights offer a lot of tools out of the box to better understand your public. By combining those tools in meaningful ways you can get even more useful insights. Some of those methods are:

- **Analysis of the public engagement** - the process of analyzing who engaged with what content. Particularly useful to see what sort of posts, messages or communications worked on certain demographic groups (age brackets, location based, income based). Based on that you can then assess and predict what impact a new campaign targeting that specific audience group will have and what engagements to expect in the future.
- **Asses the competition in your niches** - Through this way, companies are researching audiences, offered product and marketing strategies of their competitors. This is usually done by marketing specialists and data scientists and the objective is to either come with a better campaign than the competition or to avoid their method and focus on another demographic group all together.
- **Behaviour patterns investigations** - This is widely known in the industry also as "Direct extraction" and is using Facebook tools and metrics to gather data about your consumer base. Those metrics often include: behaviour patterns (employed also in analysis of public engagement), platform usage time, number of likes for certain communications. Due to those metrics being collected, Facebook faced a lot of Flak at the end of 2018 which forced the tech giant to make the data more abstract or hide those metrics all together.

Web automated scrapers

This method is employing widely available web scrapers which you configure to scrape the data from the social platforms which is meaningful for you. That data then is build into reports by a specialized marketing team in a joint effort with usually a data science team.

Benefits

- Infinite granularity
- You control when the data is made available
- Infinite ways to report data

Drawback

- The organization needs an development team
- The organization needs an data science team
- The organization needs an social media focused marketing department
- Higher costs to run

Effective communication via Facebook

Nowadays there are lots of ways to address your audience on Facebook. Some of them are detailed below:

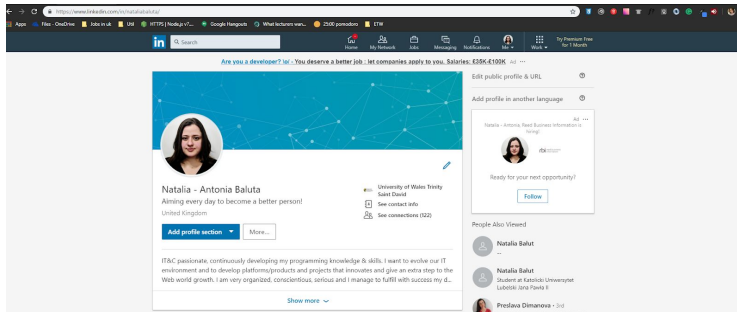
- Communicating via posts - Through this form of communication, the company will employ Facebook posts to deliver public messages about their product and services. Those can be easily tracked in terms of engagement and success in Facebook Insights.
- Connect directly with the audience via messages - When your users have certain queries regarding their use case, posting on your company timeline might be ineffective. Therefore private messages are used in those cases. Those are also making the audience feel more included and usually translates to higher user ratings in the long term.

Evidence of own professional online presence

LinkedIn (Link: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/nataliabaluta/>)

Although not subject of this study, LinkedIn offers an easy way to share your capabilities, skill levels and abilities. On top of that offers job searching functionalities directly integrated with the profile created on their platform.

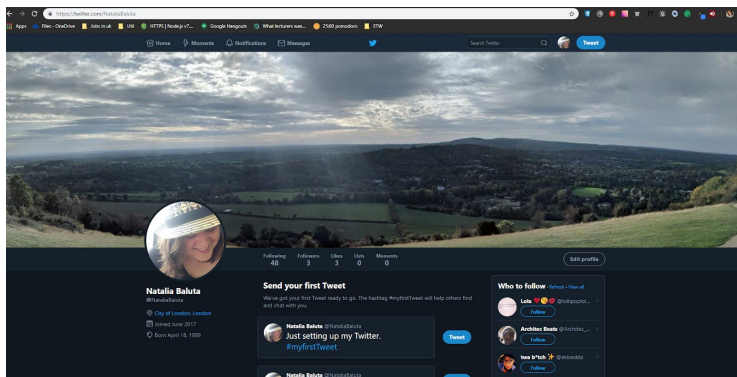
Screenshot:



Twitter (Link: <https://twitter.com/NataliaBaluta>)

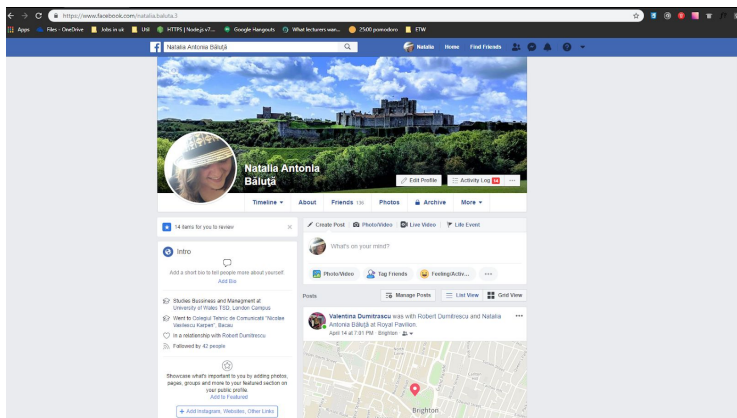
Despite this study not focusing on Twitter, this platform allows you to share your views, opinions and to react on different subject. The content shared there can positively or negatively affect your career and business opportunities in the future since it has such a huge customer base.

Screenshot:



Facebook (Link: <https://www.facebook.com/natalia.baluta.3>)

Screenshot:



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