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The Role of Social Media Usage in the Professional Development of Employees in Micro-Scale Furniture Manufacturing Enterprises in Trabzon, Turkey

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Micro-scale enterprises contribute to the economies of the countries they are located in, such as employment generation, rural development, and providing training opportunities for semi-skilled workers. They constitute the majority of enterprises in terms of number, but their share in the production rate is low. Furniture manufacturing is one of the sub-branches of the main manufacturing industry, and the majority of the enterprises that produce furniture are micro-scale. These enterprises face several challenges. One of these challenges is that a significant portion of their employees have not received any formal vocational training. The communication opportunities and tools (such as social media) of our time have made it easier to access information. This has made informal education possible for those who have not received a formal vocational training or have received it but want to improve themselves. In this study, the use of social media in the vocational development of employees of micro-scale enterprises manufacturing furniture was investigated. With this objective, a structured survey was conducted face-to-face with 110 participants in the central district of Trabzon to adequately represent the target population. To analyze the data, frequency tables, Spearman Correlation Analysis, Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normality, Kruskal-Wallis, Mann-Whitney U and Chi-Squared Tests were used. The findings indicate that a significant majority of the employees are aged between 25 and 54, with 47.2 % lacking any vocational training. Furthermore, substantial differences were observed in the employees' use of social media for vocational development purposes, correlated with their age and educational level.

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Introduction

With the development of mass media, the idea of educating the masses collectively emerged, and this idea continued to develop with each new means of communication. At this point, the development of digital technology and the spread of the internet, the rise of smartphones and social media platforms, have created an area that is easily accessible and open to content production for millions

of people. An education process is no longer confined to formal education. Today's media communication tools continue to provide new information and are increasingly effective in changing and developing our lives and the way we do business. For example, especially in language education, communication tools contribute to the development of students' language skills and provide an effective learning experience (Haristiani, 2019).

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Considering the features such as the rapid spread of content, its accessibility at any time, the coexistence of similar content, accessibility without paying a high fee, independence from a specific time and place, and the constant updating of content, it seems much more advantageous to provide education through social media. For this reason, it is thought that those working in areas with low budgets, time, space, and financial disadvantages for education, such as micro-scale furniture businesses, can benefit from social media channels in their vocational development. In addition, although there are studies in the literature on the use of social media for educational purposes, no study has been found on employees of micro-scale businesses manufacturing furniture, which is the subject of the study. It is seen that the majority of studies in the literature on social media and the furniture sector focus on marketing and consumer behavior (Okcu & Morkoç, 2017; Bardak, Avcı, Kayahan, Bardak & Türkmen, 2018; Karayılmazlar et al., 2019; Yıldırım, 2019). In this context, determining the use of social media channels by employees of micro-scale businesses manufacturing furniture for their vocational development will provide significant contributions both to the sector and to literature.

The main purpose of this research is to examine which social media channels are utilized, and to what extent, for the professional development of employees in micro-scale furniture manufacturing businesses. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the impact of employees' age and educational background on their use of social media for vocational development. In this context, the hypotheses of the research were determined as follows:

H_{01} : Employees use social media for their vocational development.

H_{02} : There is a relationship between employee ages and the number of social media used.

H_{03} : There is a relationship between employee ages and the types of social media used.

H_{04} : There is a relationship between employee education level and age.

H_{05} : Employees find social media useful for their vocational development.

Micro-scale enterprises and their importance

Micro-scale enterprises participate in national economies at varying rates. Although this proportion varies according to the country's level of development, such enterprises hold the largest share in every country (Met, 2011). The change in the number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Turkey between 2009 and 2019 is illustrated in Fig. 1. According to the distribution of scale in the figure, the majority of enterprises are micro-scale. The number of micro-scale enterprises, which was 2.468 million in 2009, increased to 2.979 million in 2019. In 2019, micro-scale enterprises provided employment for 5.62 million individuals. Additionally, 11.6 % of the micro-scale enterprises in 2019 operated in the manufacturing sector (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020). Furniture manufacturing is one of the subsectors within this manufacturing sector.

The Statistical Classification of Economic Activities in the European Community – NACE Rev. 1.1 is a classification system used for the systematic categorization of economic activities for statistical analysis, policy formulation, and economic research purposes. Within this classification system, furniture manufacturing is represented under the code “36” and the heading “Manufacturing Not Elsewhere Classified”. This category encompasses subcategories ranging from 36.11 to 36.63. Furniture manufacturing is included in the segments represented by the codes 36.11 to 36.15 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020). This coding system is also utilized by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat). According to TurkStat, there are 1788835 micro-scale enterprises operating across all sectors in Turkey, which represents 96.3 % of all enterprises in the country. The number of micro-scale enterprises classified under the code “36”

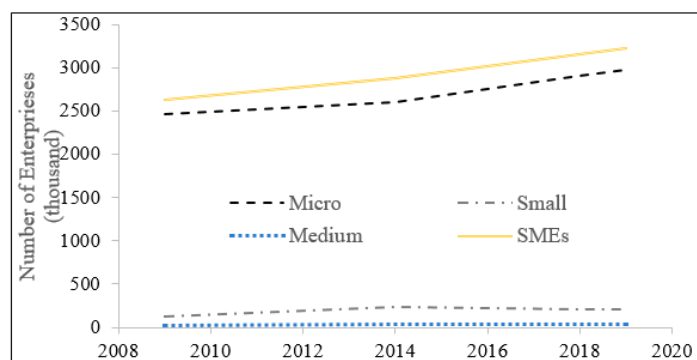


Fig. 1. Change in the number of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Türkiye between 2009 and 2019 (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2020)

for “Manufacturing Not Elsewhere Classified” is 33852 (Eurostat, 2024). However, this figure does not represent the number of micro-scale enterprises engaged in furniture manufacturing due to the reasons mentioned above. TurkStat data does not separately specify the number of enterprises involved in furniture manufacturing within the range of 36.11-36.15. Another source states that 29346 companies are operating in the furniture sector in Turkey, employing 92567 individuals, which equates to an average of three employees per company. When including carpenters and sole proprietorships, this figure is believed to rise to nearly 70000 enterprises (Trabzon Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2024).

Micro-scale enterprises contribute to various aspects, including job creation, rural development, poverty reduction, entrepreneurship, identification and evaluation of market opportunities, and export growth, thereby supporting medium and large enterprises (Aynadis & Mohammednur, 2014). SMEs are recognized for their increased use of local raw materials, job creation, involvement in rural and urban development, fostering entrepreneurship, mobilizing local savings, establishing connections with larger industries, promoting regional balance through more equitable investment distribution, providing opportunities for self-employment, and facilitating training for managers and semi-skilled workers (Taiwo, Ayodeji, & Yusuf, 2012). In Turkey, micro-scale enterprises account for 34 % of total employment and 8 % of added value. In the European Union, micro-scale enterprises represent 27.8 % of all businesses, generating 20.8 % of added value (Özbek, 2008). These figures indicate that micro-scale enterprises in Turkey are not producing a sufficient level of added value. To enhance added value, it is essential to focus on education, the quality of the workforce and the monitoring of technological advancements (Uğur, 2018). The engagement of employees in the lifelong learning process within micro-scale enterprises involved in furniture manufacturing is primarily related to the improvement of educational processes, which in turn enhances the qualifications of the workforce.

The role of social media in education

“Education is defined as the entire process through which an individual develops valuable skills, abilities, attitudes, and other behaviors within society” (Demirel & Ün, 1987; Konuk & Güntaş, 2019). The primary objective of the educational process is to achieve a lasting change in individual behavior. Education can be divided into two main categories: informal and formal education. Informal education occurs spontaneously and is not based on a predetermined program. For example, individuals may learn unconsciously through interactions with the groups they belong to. They can

acquire new knowledge and reflect it in their behaviors within the family, at school, in their workplaces, or through mass media. This type of education also exemplifies the concept of lifelong learning.

The other type of education is formal education, which is a structured process delivered by an educator based on a pre-planned program, including evaluations at specific stages. Formal education can be further divided into two subcategories: formal and non-formal education. Formal education refers to the structured learning experiences that individuals undergo during specific periods of their lives to acquire general and specialized knowledge. In contrast, non-formal education represents a type of education that individuals can pursue to enhance their proficiency in any occupation, without being confined to a specific timeframe in their lives.

There are numerous studies in the literature regarding the use of communication tools as instruments for non-formal education (Huifen, Xin, & Xinyu, 2002; Xakaza-Kumalo, 2010). Each new communication technology has been examined for its potential to transform into a mass education tool, with its advantages and disadvantages duly reviewed. As we move into the present day, the zeitgeist is to evaluate whether social media platforms can contribute as non-formal education tools. Social media refers to platforms that utilize the internet, where users engage in mutual communication and interaction. The ability of these platforms to facilitate participation, enable real-time conversations, create communities of individuals with shared interests, and establish connections among various websites, resources, and people, as well as the ease of content creation (Öztürk & Talas, 2015), illustrates that they offer a distinctly different environment from traditional mass communication tools. Social media encompasses areas such as blogs, microblogs, instant messaging applications, forums, chat sites, and social networks (Akar, 2010), providing spaces for sharing information and content, allowing users to easily find what they are looking for, and enabling users with similar interests to come together without limitations of time and space.

Since social media provides an environment where instant interaction and communication can be provided, it creates an environment where both informal and formal education can be received. Individuals can learn spontaneously from social media platforms or receive education within the framework of an educator’s planned education. In addition, social media platforms have the potential to become a widespread education tool. It is possible for an individual to improve themselves by watching various content on a subject they do not feel competent in. For example, it is possible to fix a broken washing machine at home after watching a few educational videos.

In the study conducted by Öztürk and Talas (2015) on the use of social media as an educational tool, it is emphasized that social media platforms are flexible and user-friendly and easier to use than other educational structures (Öztürk & Talas, 2015). Konuk and Güntaş (2019) discussed the issue of social media providing an ideal environment for education in their study and stated that social media is useful in enriching experiences and expressing them effectively in the educational process (Konuk & Güntaş, 2019). In addition, it is very important for learning that social media tools such as wikis, podcasts, and blogs, which facilitate the participation of users and enable their interaction, provide structures that support information sharing and collaboration that may be required in the active learning process (Ajjan & Hartshorne, 2008).

In the lifelong learning process, learning can be easily carried out at home or at work outside of traditional educational institutions (Lauder, Brown, Dillabough, & Halsey, 2006). When social media tools, especially YouTube^{TR} and Facebook^{TR}, are evaluated in the context of social learning, it is predicted that they will take users beyond being passive consumers and will also cause a radical change in the education system (Öztürk & Talas, 2015).

Social support, informal learning, discovery and sharing of information, content generation, and the user receiving the information they want can be listed among the benefits that social media tools will provide in the educational field (Konuk & Güntaş, 2019). It is seen that social networks support interpersonal interaction, create the informal aspect of education, develop conversations and interactions that contribute to learning, and provide an environment that supports the production and transmission of information. Field studies also support the use of social media for information sharing and education purposes other than communication. For example, it has been determined that when university students share course content with each other, they feel closer to each other and start using a common language. In addition, it has been shown that social media supports the educational process, such as completing the individual's deficiencies, meeting needs, and being in constant communication with colleagues (Yazıcı & Özel, 2017; Özen, Çam, Can, & Dönmez, 2018). In short, it is seen that education is a process, and social media has an educational role in this process.

The education level of employees working in micro-scale businesses manufacturing furniture has been reported as not high. Akyüz (1998) reported the rate of primary and secondary school graduates as 91.4 % in his study on the structure of the forest products industry in Trabzon province. In the total of the provinces forming the Eastern Black Sea Region, this rate

accounts to 77.5 % (Akyüz, 2000). A study examining the socio-economic characteristics of forest industry businesses in Bartın province documented the rate of primary and secondary school graduates as 61.6 % (Karayılmazlar, Çabuk, & Aşkın, 2006). In a similar study, Top *et al.* (2014) reported that 52.4 % of employees working in this sector in Gümüşhane were primary and secondary school graduates (Top, Adanur, Öz, & Yaşar, 2014). While these studies clearly show a decrease in the rate of primary and secondary school graduates, this number still constitutes a significant portion. The importance of this is that sector employees who are primary and secondary school graduates have not received any formal vocational training. Koç *et al.* (2015) report that current educational institutions providing formal education in this sector are inadequate in terms of quality and quantity, because furniture education is limited in the curricula of these formal education institutions (Koç, Kurtoğlu, Erdinler, & Hazır, 2015).

Materials and methods

Materials

In this study, micro-scale enterprises manufacturing furniture in the central district of Trabzon in Turkey were selected as the material. According to the latest industrial and workplace census conducted by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) in 2002, there are 373 micro-scale enterprises under the subheading of "manufacturing not classified elsewhere" in Trabzon. Since there are enterprises manufacturing other than furniture under this heading (36.2-36.63), the number of enterprises manufacturing furniture indicated with codes 36.11-36.15 is not specified separately (Eurostat, 2024). Therefore, it is not clear how many of the 373 enterprises manufacture furniture. In addition, these numbers are not up-to-date. Top *et al.* (2018) found the number of micro-scale enterprises manufacturing furniture in Trabzon to be 511 based on the membership records of professional chambers (Top, Adanur, & Öz, 2018). 97.9 % of the enterprises manufacturing furniture operating in Trabzon are micro-scale (Top, 2020).

Methods

The study was designed as a quantitative field research. Data were collected using a face-to-face structured survey technique. The universe of the study (511 businesses, Top, Adanur, & Öz, 2018) consists of employees of micro-scale businesses manufacturing furniture in Trabzon province. The number of samples to represent the study universe was calculated according to equation 1 (Arıkan, 2011).

$$[N \times t^2 \times p \times q] / [(N - 1) \times D^2 + t^2 \times p \times q] \quad (1)$$

In the equation, n is the number of samples; t is the confidence coefficient (1.96 for $\alpha=0.05$); N is the main population (511 enterprises); p is the estimation rate of the main population characteristics (this value is taken as 0.9 since micro-scale enterprises are homogeneous in terms of characteristics); q is the probability that the investigated characteristics are not in the main population ($1-p=q$) and D is the sampling error (5 % sampling error is accepted). With the calculation made depending on these assumptions and values, the sample number (n) was calculated as 108.96, but it was accepted as 110. Since data were collected from only one employee per business, the sample was defined at the enterprise level, although the unit of analysis was individual. This method was chosen to ensure that each business was represented through one of its employees. A comparable sampling strategy was adopted by Chundu, Chigombe, and Mucheri (2022), who selected 115 enterprises from a population of 800 small and medium-sized businesses in Harare and collected data via business representatives. Although the sampling unit and the analytical unit in this study did not align perfectly, this discrepancy did not undermine the relationship between the sample and the research questions. On the contrary, the homogeneity among data units contributed to maintaining representational integrity throughout the sample.

The survey study was prepared to determine whether social media is used for professional education purposes and the approach (thought) towards social media as an educational tool. The 14-question survey, developed by the researchers, was pretested with 15 people. Identified errors were corrected, and the final version was finalized after expert opinion was obtained. In the last part of the survey form, demographic variables such as age and education status were inquired. In addition, questions were asked to determine which social media platform the participants use the most and whether there is an account, channel or group that is followed/subscribed to related to work.

The frequency of the data obtained in this study was shown in frequency tables. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to investigate the conformity of the data to

a normal distribution. Based on the descriptive statistics computed for the survey items, the average skewness was calculated as 1.38, and the average kurtosis as 3.09 across the dataset. These values indicate that the data distribution deviates significantly from normality, particularly showing moderate to high positive skewness and leptokurtic tendencies. Therefore, parametric assumptions regarding normal distribution are not met. In line with these findings and the ordinal nature of the data, non-parametric statistical methods were employed in the analysis. This methodological choice ensures the validity of statistical inferences given the characteristics of the dataset. After determining that the data did not show a normal distribution, nonparametric tests were applied. These tests are the Spearman correlation coefficient, the Kruskal-Wallis Test, the Mann-Whitney U, and the Chi-Square tests. The Spearman correlation coefficient was used to investigate whether there was a relationship between variables. The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to investigate whether there was a difference between the group medians of three or more categorical variables. However, this test does not specify which categorical variables the difference occurred between. For this purpose, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to test categorical variables in groups of two and to determine which categorical variables showed a difference. The Chi-Square test was used to investigate whether there was a relationship between two or more categorical variables.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23 (IBM Corp, 2015). Data collection and analysis were conducted by the researchers. No financial support was received from any institution or individual.

Results

The age distribution groups of employees were created based on the “employment rates by age groups” classification provided by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The OECD classifies the 15-24 age group as those entering the labor market after education (young workers); the 25-54 age group as the main workforce (middle-aged workers), and the 55-64 age group as those who have

Table 1. Distribution of participants by age groups

Groups	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Std. Deviation
Young	21	19.1	19.90	2.567
Middle-Aged	70	63.6	42.26	8.027
Older	19	17.3	59.32	4.056
Total	110	100.0	40.94	13.782

reached the peak of their careers and are preparing for retirement (older workers) (OECD, 2014). However, since there were 3 workers over the age of 64 among the participants in the current study, these workers were included in the 55 and over group. When the age distribution of the participants is examined in Table 1, it is seen that the 25-54 age group constitutes 63.6 % of the total. The average age of the participants was found to be 40.94 ± 13.78 .

When the conformity of participants' ages to a normal distribution was examined, the result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test ($n > 50$) (Bursal, 2017) was calculated as $p_{(0.004)} < 0.05$. Since $p < 0.05$, the hypothesis " H_1 : The data distribution is not normal." was accepted. Therefore, in this study, non-parametric tests were used for statistical analyses regarding employee ages, rather than parametric tests. When investigating whether the ordinal scores (group medians) of the groups in Table 1 differ from each other using the Kruskal-Wallis Test, a significant difference between the age groups of the employees was found, as $p_{(0.001)} < 0.05$.

The average ages of employees in micro-scale furniture manufacturing businesses, categorized by educational background, are presented in Table 2. Employees who are vocational high school graduates are ranked in first place (24.5 %) in terms of the number of employees; those who have an associate degree or higher are ranked last (13.6 %). When examining the average ages across educational groups, primary school graduates have the highest average age of 52.46 years, followed by middle school graduates with an average age of 42.69 years.

The correlation between the ages of employees and the number of social media platforms used by employees was investigated. Since the significance value calculated for the Spearman correlation coefficient ($rs = -0.292$; $p = 0.002$) is $p < 0.05$, the hypothesis " H_0 : There is no correlation." is rejected. This results indicate a significant relationship between employee ages and the number of social media platforms they use. This relationship is inversely directed and weak ($|r| \leq 0.30$). It can be inferred that as employee age increases, the number

of social media channels utilized decreases, while conversely, as employee age decreases, the number of social media channels utilized increases.

When the difference in the ordinal age scores (group medians) among educational groups was examined using the Kruskal-Wallis test, the result was found to be significant, with $p_{(0.001)} < 0.05$. This means that the difference between the group medians is statistically significant. However, since this test does not indicate which specific group medians differ significantly, pairwise comparisons were conducted using the Mann-Whitney U test. The results showed that the median age of primary school graduates differed significantly from the other groups ($p_{(0.001)} < 0.05$). No significant differences were found between the medians of the other groups. For example, when comparing the middle school and high school graduate groups, the result was $p_{(0.351)} > 0.05$. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the ages of primary school graduate employees are significantly higher than those of employees from the other groups, while the age differences among the other groups are not significant. Additionally, the fact that 63.2 % of primary school graduate employees fall within the older employee group (aged 55 and above) further supports this conclusion.

When investigating whether there is a relationship between employees' ages and their educational status, the Spearman correlation coefficient was found to be $rs = -0.481$; $p = 0.001$. Since $p < 0.05$, the hypothesis " H_0 : There is no correlation." is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between employee ages and their education levels. The relationship is negative and of moderate strength ($0.30 < |r| \leq 0.70$). In other words, as employee age increases, the education level tends to decrease, or conversely, as employee age decreases, the education level tends to increase.

The social media platforms used by employees of micro-scale furniture manufacturing businesses are shown in Table 3. When the table values are examined, the following findings stand out: The total number of social media channels used by the 110 participants

Table 2. Age values of participants by educational level

Educational Groups	Frequency	Percent	Mean	Standard Deviation
Primary school	26	23.6	52.46	7.726
Middle school	26	23.6	42.69	10.740
High school	16	14.5	38.69	14.013
Vocational high school	27	24.5	31.56	14.750
Associate degree or higher	15	13.6	37.20	10.435
Total	110	100.0	40.94	13.782

is 463. This means that there are an average of 4.21 social media platforms per participant. The three most commonly used social media platforms are WhatsApp^{TR}, Instagram^{TR}, and Facebook^{TR}. Conversely, the least used platforms are LinkedIn^{TR}, Telegram^{TR}, and Twitter/X^{TR}.

When analyzing the usage of social media accounts by educational groups, WhatsApp^{TR} has a very high usage rate across all educational levels. For instance, out of 26 primary school graduates, 25 use this application; 15 out of the 16 high school graduates use it; and among the 15 participants with an associate degree or higher, 11 use WhatsApp^{TR}. In contrast, when examining the use of LinkedIn^{TR} across educational groups, it is evident that this application is not used at all by primary and middle school graduates and only by 4 participants with a high school diploma or higher.

When the Mann-Whitney U test was used to investigate whether the difference between the age group medians of users and non-users of social media applications given in Table 3 is significant, the following results were obtained: The difference between the group medians of users and non-users of YouTube^{TR}, Instagram^{TR}, TikTok^{TR} and Telegram^{TR} was found to be significant. In other words, the age group median of those who do not use these social media applications was found to be higher than the age group median of those who use them. For example, the arithmetic mean age of YouTube^{TR} users is 36.43 years. The arithmetic mean age of non-users is 45.96 years. These arithmetic means support the fact that the difference between the group medians was significant in the Mann-Whitney U test. The difference between the age group medians

Table 3. Distribution of social media platforms/applications by educational groups

		Educational Status					Total
		Primary	Middle	High	Vocational	Associate Degree and Higher	
YouTube ^{TR}	Count	8	15	8	18	9	58
	Percent	13.8	25.9	13.8	31.0	15.5	
WhatsApp ^{TR}	Count	25	21	15	26	11	98
	Percent	25.5	21.4	15.3	26.5	11.2	
Instagram ^{TR}	Count	15	19	12	23	12	81
	Percent	18.5	23.5	14.8	28.4	14.8	
Facebook ^{TR}	Count	16	20	9	16	9	70
	Percent	22.9	28.6	12.9	22.9	12.9	
TikTok ^{TR}	Count	3	9	5	14	4	35
	Percent	8.6	25.7	14.3	40.0	11.4	
Telegram ^{TR}	Count	0	4	3	8	3	18
	Percent	0.0	22.2	16.7	44.4	16.7	
Google+ ^{TR}	Count	8	13	9	13	4	47
	Percent	17.0	27.7	19.1	27.7	8.5	
Twitter ^{TR} /X ^{TR}	Count	2	6	3	6	6	23
	Percent	8.7	26.1	13.0	26.1	26.1	
Pinterest ^{TR}	Count	8	7	3	6	5	29
	Percent	27.6	24.1	10.3	20.7	17.2	
LinkedIn ^{TR}	Count	0	0	2	1	1	4
	Percent	0.0	0.0	50.0	25.0	25.0	
Total	Count	26	26	16	27	15	110

of users and non-users of WhatsApp^{TR}, Facebook^{TR}, Google+^{TR}, Twitter^{TR}/X^{TR}, Pinterest^{TR}, and LinkedIn^{TR} applications is not significant. For example, the arithmetic mean of WhatsApp^{TR} users is 40.87 years; the arithmetic mean of those who did not use the internet for 41.5 years, which also helps explain why the difference in the Mann-Whitney U test was not significant.

The distribution of responses to questions determining whether social media is used for professional vocational purposes is presented in Table 4. All participants in the study (110 employees) use at least one social media platform. However, a total of 8 employees (7.3 %), consisting of 3 primary school graduates, 3 middle school graduates, and 2 vocational high school graduates, reported that they had not seen any content related to their work on their social media accounts.

Since Table 4 shows the responses to questions regarding the use of social media related to their work, these 8 participants have been excluded from the analysis. Accordingly, when the findings in Table 4 are evaluated, 56.9 % of the employees tried to make a product they saw on social media; 65.7 % applied a work technique they saw related to their work; 55.9 % shared their own experiences on social media; 74.5 % noticed that different tools/equipment were used in their profession that they were not aware of; 64.7 % saw a different use of a tool/equipment they knew; 56.1 % of those who saw this also stated that they tried this different usage method. It was also found that 68.6 % of those who use social media to see professional posts searched social media channels to solve a problem they encountered while doing their job.

Table 4. Use of social media content for educational purposes

	Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
The situation of seeing posts related to their profession on social media	Yes	102	92.7	92.7
	No	8	7.3	7.3
	Total	110	100.0	100.0
The situation of attempting to make a product from a seen post	Yes	58	56.9	56.9
	No	44	43.1	43.1
	Total	102	100.0	100.0
The situation of applying a work technique from a seen post	Yes	67	65.7	65.7
	No	35	34.3	34.3
	Total	102	100.0	100.0
The situation of sharing their own work experience on social media	Yes	57	55.9	55.9
	No	45	44.1	44.1
	Total	102	100.0	100.0
The situation of observing different tools/equipment used in their profession	Yes	76	74.5	75.2
	No	25	24.5	24.8
	Total	101	99.0	100.0
	Missing	1	1.0	
	Total	102	100.0	
The situation of observing a different usage of a tool or equipment they know	Yes	66	64.7	64.7
	No	36	35.3	35.3
	Total	102	100.0	100.0
The situation of trying a tool or equipment with a different usage	Yes	37	56.1	57.8
	No	27	40.9	42.2
	Total	64	97.0	100.0
	Missing	2	3.0	
	Total	66	100.0	
The situation of searching social media for solutions to problems related to their work	Yes	70	68.6	68.6
	No	32	31.4	31.4
	Total	102	100.0	100.0

When investigating whether there is a significant difference in the age group medians between employees who answered “yes” and “no” to the questions in Table 4, the Mann-Whitney U test results indicated that the difference was not significant ($p > 0.05$). For instance, the difference in age group medians between those who shared their work experience on social media and those who did not was calculated as $p_{(0.335)} > 0.05$. This means that there is no significant difference in the ages of employees who share their experiences and those who do not.

When the topics for which frequency and ratio values are given in Table 4 are arranged according to their educational status, Table 5 is obtained and is shown below. Chi-Squared (X^2) test of independence

was applied to investigate whether there is a relationship between the “yes” or “no” answers given by the participants to the topics in this table and their educational status. In this test, if $p > 0.05$, the hypothesis established as “ H_0 : There is no relationship between the variables.” is accepted. Otherwise, the counter hypothesis is accepted. Accordingly, trying to make a product seen on social media, applying a technique seen, employees sharing their own experiences on social media, seeing a different way of using the tools/equipment they use in doing their job, trying this way of using a tool seen to be used differently; searching for solutions to problems in social media applications and their educational status were investigated, respectively, $X^2(4, n=102)=4.049$; $p=0.394$; $X^2(4, n=102)=4.214$; $p=0.378$; $X^2(4, n=101)=5.159$; $p=0.271$;

Table 5. Approach to social media content according to educational status

		Educational Status					Total
		Primary	Middle	High	Vocational High	Associate Degree and Higher	
The situation of seeing posts related to their profession on social media	Yes	23	23	16	25	15	102
	No	3	3	0	2	0	8
Total		26	26	16	27	15	110
The situation of attempting to make a product from a seen post	Yes	14	15	11	11	7	58
	No	9	8	5	14	8	44
Total		23	23	16	25	15	102
The situation of applying a work technique from a seen post	Yes	17	17	11	15	7	67
	No	6	6	5	10	8	35
Total		23	23	16	25	15	102
The situation of sharing their own work experience on social media	Yes	13	16	6	12	10	57
	No	10	7	10	13	5	45
Total		23	23	16	25	15	102
The situation of observing different tools/equipment used in their profession	Yes	15	19	11	17	14	76
	No	8	4	5	7	1	25
Total		23	23	16	24	15	101
The situation of observing a different usage of a tool or equipment they know	Yes	15	19	11	17	14	76
	No	8	4	5	7	1	25
Total		23	23	16	24	15	101
The situation of trying a tool or equipment with a different usage	Yes	9	9	8	6	5	37
	No	6	7	3	7	4	27
Total		15	16	11	13	9	64
The situation of searching social media for solutions to problems related to their work	Yes	14	16	11	15	14	70
	No	9	7	5	10	1	32
Total		23	23	16	25	15	102

Table 6. Approach to social media

	Valid	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Thoughts on the shared content seen	Informative	53	35.6	
	Educational	49	32.9	
	Promotional	25	16.8	
	Exaggerated	10	6.7	
	Unrealistic	7	4.7	
	Useless	5	3.4	
	Total	149	100.0	
The situation of finding social media shares useful	Yes	90	88.2	89.1
	No	11	10.8	10.9
	Total	101	99.0	100.0
	Missing	1	1.0	
	Total	102	100.0	
The presence or absence of followed or subscribed social media platforms	Yes	45	44.1	44.1
	No	57	55.9	55.9
	Total	102	100.0	100.0
The situation of generally finding social media shares educational	Yes	86	84.3	89.6
	No	10	9.8	10.4
	Total	96	94.1	100.0
	Missing	6	5.9	
	Total	102	100.0	

X^2 (4, $n=102$)=1.958; $p=0.743$; X^2 (4, $n=64$)=1.792; $p=0.774$; X^2 (4, $n=102$)=5.769; $p=0.217$ results were obtained. Since the p -values calculated here were greater than 0.05, H_0 hypothesis was accepted.

The findings of the questions aimed at determining the employees' approach (opinion) to social media as an educational tool are summarized in Table 6. 35.6 % and 32.9 % of the employees, respectively, find the posts/content related to the professions they see on social media "insightful" and "educational". The total rate of those who find them "exaggerated", "unrealistic", and "useless" is 14.8 %. Since the participant could choose more than one option in this question, the same participant could evaluate some of the social media posts he/she follows as "insightful" and some as "useless". Therefore, it was possible for him/her to give more than one and opposing answer. In general, professional posts made on social media were found to be "useful" by 89.1 % and "educational" by 89.6 %.

In addition, 44.1 % of the employees declared that they were members/subscribers to a social media platform for professional purposes.

Table 6 examines whether there is a significant difference between employees' thoughts on the posts/contents related to their professions seen on social media platforms and their ages, using the Mann-Whitney U test. The comparisons were made excluding the eight participants who stated they did not use social media in relation to their professions. Accordingly, it was found that the differences between those who think that the posts seen on social media are informative, educational, promotional, exaggerated, unrealistic, and useless, and those who do not hold these opinions, are not significant. In all comparisons, $p>0.05$ was found, so the null hypothesis (H_0), which states "There is no difference," was accepted. When calculating the arithmetic age averages of these groups, the average age of those who found social media posts "educational" was 38.64 years, while the average

age of those who did not find them “educational” was 43.08 years. The average age of the 10 employees who found the posts exaggerated was 47.8 years, whereas the average age of the 92 employees who did not find them exaggerated was 40.21 years. Overall, there is similarity in the perspectives of employees’ ages regarding the professional content shared on social media in the aforementioned aspects. No significant relationship was found between employees’ educational levels and their perceptions of posts seen on social media as “informative,” “educational,” or “promotional”. Pearson correlation coefficients were found to be $p > 0.05$. The relationship between those who found the posts “exaggerated,” “unrealistic,” and “useless,” and their educational levels could not be determined due to the lack of a cell value condition in the test.

When the group medians of those who think that the posts made on social media are generally useful and those who do not think that they are useful were investigated with the Mann-Whitney U test, the difference was found to be significant, as $p_{(0.026)} < 0.05$. The arithmetic age average of those who find the posts useful is 39.71 years, while the average age of those who find them useless is 50.36 years. When investigating the relationship between employees’ social media memberships or subscriptions and age, $p_{(0.001)} < 0.05$ was found, which means that the difference between subscribers and non-subscribers is significant. Looking at the arithmetic averages, those with social media subscriptions have an average age of 36, while those without have an average age of 44.86. When comparing those who generally find social media posts educational and those who do not, $p_{(0.349)} > 0.05$ was found. This indicates that the difference between these groups is not significant. When examining the arithmetic averages of these groups, it can be seen that they are close to each other. The average age of those who find the posts generally educational is 40 years, while the average age of those who do not is 45.5 years.

Discussion

The furniture sector in Turkey is important in terms of employment. The increase in domestic demand, along with an increase in the urbanization rate, has accelerated the development of the furniture sector in recent years. According to the latest evaluations, the estimated production amount in the furniture sector is 6 billion dollars and has a share of around 0.75 % in Turkey’s Gross National Product. Although high-technology production enterprises have increased their activities with sector investments in the Turkish furniture industry in recent years, there are generally workshop-type, small and medium-sized enterprises that produce with traditional methods (Özdağ, Yeşilkaya, & Çabuk, 2017).

The micro-scale enterprises that manufacture furniture analyzed in this study are enterprises that produce with traditional methods. Being on social media both as an individual and a business provides advantages in many aspects, such as starting the right job at the right time, being able to communicate directly with the end consumer, etc. In this study, the rate of using social media for vocational development purposes is 92.7 %. Social media strategy positively affects manufacturing flexibility, delivery flexibility and market performance (Macharia & Namusonge, 2021; Yu, Zhang, Wang & Huo, 2025). Gök Uğur *et al.* (2018) reported the rate of using social media for educational purposes by employees in another occupational group to be 96 % (Gök Uğur, Seyis, Özçelik & Toduk, 2018). When the participants are evaluated according to their education levels, it can be said that middle school and vocational high school graduates use social media more intensively for vocational training purposes. This puts social media in an important position, regardless of whether it is a large or small-scale business. In addition, social media platforms create an invaluable opportunity for small businesses without high budgets in terms of competition (Şengöz & Eroğlu, 2017). For example, considering the financial constraints that SMEs frequently face, the fact that social media platforms are generally free to use offers more suitable opportunities compared to traditional methods (Alnadi, 2023). Social media indirectly affects growth, especially when it comes to product and service sales for small-scale businesses (Montague I., Gazal, Wiedenbeck, & Shepherd, 2016; Henry, 2019). A study examining the corporate profiles of Brazilian wooden house manufacturers and dealers on Instagram® found that the virtual sales landscape is still in its infancy. However, many companies are using corporate profiles to explain the features and options of available wooden houses as a strategy for establishing initial contact with potential customers and then commercializing their products in their offices (De Araujo *et al.*, 2022). This situation can be evaluated as affecting professional development and indirectly affecting growth when it comes to educational use. On the other hand, a report emphasized that SME employees are disadvantaged in creating learning communities and are isolated due to their location and/or profession. In the same study, it is emphasized that such small business employees have little time and motivation to test new learning methods. In the context of the work done in the study, it is stated that employees need to learn quickly (just in time) and therefore continue with what they are familiar with (Hamburg & Hall, 2008). In our study, we found that in posts related to the work done, the rate of seeing a new technique, a new tool, is high, and the new techniques seen are open to implementation, but the implementation rate is lower. Recent

studies show that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) lack the “e-skills” necessary to successfully implement and use information and communication technologies for their businesses and enterprises (Hamburg & Cernian, 2006). However, one study shows that work-related social media use can increase employee creativity through information sharing and manipulation (Zhang, Wang, & Chen, 2023). When the findings obtained in our study are evaluated, it is found that the education levels of employees are increasing, while their age levels are decreasing. Accordingly, it is believed that the future working generations will be more successful in the mentioned e-skills. The majority of the participants working in micro-scale furniture enterprises and responding to the questions are middle-aged employees; this is followed by young employees. Therefore, employees between the ages of 25-54 are more concentrated in furniture enterprises. In a study conducted on consumers of wooden products, it was found that as the population ages, consumers of wooden products will continue to shift from being traditional media users to being consumers addicted to technology and social media (Montague, Gazal, & Wiedenbeck, 2019). Therefore, when looked at from the perspective of the producer, it can be predicted that more than half of them use social media for vocational training, while social media can be used for more vocational training of younger employees in the future. Gök Uğur *et al.* (2018) also found a significant relationship between age and education status, and social media usage for professional development (Gök Uğur, Seyis, Özçelik, & Toduk, 2018).

The majority of the participants in the study were primary and secondary school graduates, followed by high school and vocational high school graduates. When the use of social media platforms was examined according to their educational status, the vocational high school group used all social media platforms more intensively. For example, Telegram^{TR} was used at a rate of 44.4 %, TikTok^{TR} at a rate of 40 %, and YouTube^{TR} at a rate of 31 %. It is seen that middle school graduates use FacebookTM intensively. The applications WhatsApp^{TR}, Instagram^{TR} and Facebook^{TR} are the most intensively used in all education groups. The age group median of those who do not use YouTube^{TR}, Instagram^{TR}, TikTok^{TR} and Telegram^{TR} applications was found to be higher than the age group median of those who do. Therefore, it can be said that those who use such social media platforms are in the younger age group (36.43 years) and those who do not use them are above middle age (45.96 years). Although the membership/subscription rate of employees to a social media platform for professional purposes (44.1 %) is low, they find the posts/content related to their professions they see on social media “insightful” and “educational”.

In general, professional posts made on social media are thought to be highly “useful” (89.1 %) and “educational” (89.6 %). When we look at the literature, we see findings that are consistent with these results. In their study, Gök Uğur *et al.* (2018) found the social media membership/subscription rate to be 51.9 % and the rate of those who think that social media is effective in professional development to be 77 % (Gök Uğur, Seyis, Özçelik, & Toduk, 2018). In field studies, social media content was found to be useful and inclusive when used for lifelong learning purposes (Terry and Yolanda, 2015). Although literature on informal learning is limited, the studies reached show that learning activities with technology are widely used. According to another source, 94 % of adults engage in some kind of informal learning activity. 79 % of adults use technology for an average of eight and a half hours per week to learn in their free time (Hague & Logan, 2009).

Conclusion

This study was conducted to examine the impact of social media use on the professional development of individuals working in micro-scale furniture manufacturing enterprises in Trabzon, Turkey. The sample size was calculated based on the number of businesses, and data were collected from a single employee in each enterprise. This approach aimed to ensure business-level representation through individual participants.

Normality was assessed using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, along with skewness and kurtosis values. The mean values indicated that the dataset did not follow a normal distribution. Therefore, non-parametric statistical methods were applied. This approach was selected to support objectivity and validity in accordance with the data structure. The results of hypothesis testing revealed the following relationships between demographic factors and social media use:

H₀₁: Very few employees in micro-scale furniture manufacturing enterprises do not use social media for professional development purposes.

H₀₂: There is a weak inverse relationship between employees’ ages and the number of social media platforms they use; as age increases, the number of platforms decreases.

H₀₃: On average, employees use four different social media platforms. The frequency and types of platforms vary depending on age and educational status. Some platforms are heavily used, while others are less popular. YouTube^{TR}, Instagram^{TR}, TikTok^{TR}, and Telegram^{TR} are significantly more popular among younger employees; age does not appear to affect the use of other platforms.

H₀₄: The ages of primary school graduates are higher than those in other educational groups, while the age distribution among other groups is similar. Additionally, there is a moderate inverse relationship between age and educational level; as age increases, educational attainment decreases, and vice versa.

H₀₅: Social media users interact with these platforms for various purposes such as accessing professional resources, sharing personal experiences, and experimenting with observed practices. These behaviours are independent of educational level. Moreover, neither age nor educational status significantly influences employees' perceptions of professional content encountered on social media. However, age does affect membership status; younger employees are more likely to be members of these platforms, while older employees tend to be more hesitant.

These findings indicate that social media platforms are widely used for professional development and perceived as educational tools. In the information society, social media serves a complementary role in lifelong learning and vocational skills enhancement. Access to supportive content benefits both individual employees and enterprise performance.

The study highlights the various functions social media serves in professional growth. Participants reported gaining knowledge, discovering new techniques, and learning about tools and equipment through social media. The perceived educational value and professional usefulness of social media content differ among individuals. Notably, 47.2% of the workforce comprises employees with primary or secondary school education, for whom social media appears to be a viable informal learning tool. The findings suggest that these employees have benefited from this opportunity.

As a result, social media platforms are considered useful resources for both information acquisition and professional development for employees in micro-scale furniture manufacturing businesses. This highlights the importance of integrating digital content into industry-specific training and development processes.

Micro-scale furniture manufacturing businesses exhibit a homogeneous distribution and are similar to each other. Therefore, while this study reflects findings from a specific region, the results are considered generalizable. Similar studies can be conducted in other regions, sectors, and business sizes in the future.

Conflict of interest

The author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this article.

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