




Analysis of platforms used by management students for information access and consumption

Análise das plataformas utilizadas por estudantes de gestão para acesso e consumo de informações

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ABSTRACT: *The current environment for searching for and using information is agile, and the emergence of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) challenges traditional research methods. In this study, we aim to identify the platforms and media chosen by management students to search for and consume information. In addition, we seek to understand the reasons for these choices, providing insights into data access and consumption by future managers. A survey was used, answered by 112 students of the Market Research discipline in 2022 and 2023, with content analysis based on Bardin's method. We observed that the choice for certain platforms or media is justified by their ability to provide quick and practical information. Ease of access, variety of available content, and time savings are the main benefits perceived by students, aspects that satisfy the need for immediate information consumption that facilitates decision-making.*

Keywords: *information consumption; information behavior; digital platformization; generative artificial intelligence; social media.*

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RESUMO: O ambiente atual de procura e utilização de informação é ágil, sendo que o surgimento da GenAI desafia os métodos tradicionais de pesquisa. Este estudo tem como objetivo identificar as plataformas e mídias escolhidas pelos estudantes de gestão para busca e consumo de informações. Além disso, busca compreender as razões dessas escolhas, fornecendo insights sobre acesso e consumo de dados por futuros gestores. Utilizou-se um survey, respondido por 112 estudantes da disciplina Pesquisa Mercadológica em 2022 e 2023, com análise de conteúdo baseada no método de Bardin. Observa-se que a escolha por determinadas plataformas ou mídias é justificada pela sua capacidade de fornecer informações rápidas e práticas. A facilidade de acesso, a variedade de conteúdos disponíveis e a economia de tempo são os principais benefícios percebidos pelos estudantes, aspectos que satisfazem a necessidade de consumo de informação imediata, que facilita a tomada de decisão.

Palavras-chave: consumo de informação; comportamento informacional; plataforma digital; inteligência artificial generativa; redes sociais.

Introduction

The contemporary scenario of searching for and consuming information is under constant transformation, reflecting the “Network Society” (CASTELLS, 2005) and the “Platform Society” (GILLESPIE, 2010; VAN DIJCK; POELL; WAAL, 2018). In this dynamic context, the rise of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) and tools, such as ChatGPT, challenge traditional research methods. By 2026, GenAI is estimated to reduce the use of conventional search engines — such as Google and Bing — by 25%, boosting the growth of chatbots and virtual assistants (GARTNER, 2024).

Although Google currently monopolizes about 90% of the global search engine market (SOLLITTO; ALEJANDRO, 2022), there is a significant change in search behavior, especially among the youngest. Social media platforms, such as TikTok, gained popularity, being used by 40% of Generation Z as the main search tool (SOLLITTO; ALEJANDRO, 2022; MORENO, 2023), including career guidance and job opportunities (SERRANO, 2024). These platforms are no longer limited to entertainment; they have become essential sources of information and consultation (SACCHITIELLO, 2024). The growing preference for TikTok can be attributed to the features of the platform because, while Google offers text- and link-based responses, TikTok provides short, direct videos (SOLLITTO; ALEJANDRO, 2022; SERRANO, 2024).

According to Monteiro (2024), search engines are the first wave of online marketing actions and lead investments in this dynamic environment. Social media platforms, considered the second wave, also have an influence on searches for information. Conversely, marketplaces emerge as the third digital wave, gaining popularity by offering quick searches for products that meet the economic interests of consumers and facilitating comparisons of prices, offers, and evaluations, as well as considering the searcher’s location.

This preference for marketplaces is strengthened by companies’ investment in technology and the use of primary data to customize and segment their markets (MONTEIRO, 2024). However, with the

advancement of GenAI, a fundamental change arises: users are released from the active curation of information in search engines, marketplaces, and social media platforms, as the responses are generated by applications such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Siri, and Alexa (GARTNER, 2024; MONTEIRO, 2024).

About one year after ChatGPT gained international prominence, 34% of Brazilians have already used the service. Clarifying doubts is the most common use of ChatGPT among Brazilians (MOBILE TIME; OPINION BOX, 2024). Nevertheless, artificial intelligence (AI) does not pose a threat to traditional search engines. Google, for example, since 2016, has integrated AI into its algorithm (TILIA, 2024); in turn, Bing integrates AI into Copilot results (MONTEIRO, 2024), which highlights the adaptation of traditional search platforms to emerging technologies.

These changes not only reflect an evolution in information consumption habits, but also pose new challenges to organizational strategies (GARTNER, 2024). This context raises the following questions: what forms of digital platformization are most used in the field of management for information consumption? What are the main factors in choosing information consumption platforms and media? Thus, in the present study, we aim to identify the platforms and media chosen by management students to search for and consume information. In addition, we seek to understand the reasons for these choices, providing insights into data access and consumption by future managers.

We consider that such insights are, firstly, crucial to understand the information preferences and behaviors of future professionals in the management field, mapping the trends of information consumption and the specific needs of this public. For Martínez-Silveira and Oddone (2007), information behavior refers to the process of locating, using, and managing information and resources in order to comply with informational requirements. Secondly, such insights can provide subsidies for developing more effective informational strategies, indicating reliable and relevant sources of information, as well as assisting in the search for quality content that contributes to learning and decision-making.

Moreover, there is a gap of studies on this topic in the academic literature. In a survey conducted on Scopus database, we found six articles in the last 10 years (2014-2024) with the descriptor “information behavior” AND “university,” limited to the area of “Business, Management and Accounting.” Of these articles, Mathupayas (2022) investigates the search for and verification of information by students and staff in Thailand and demographic impacts. Pongrac, Zorica and Domović (2022) analyze the information behavior of Croatian academics and the use of technology to obtain information in the areas of teaching, research, and administrative activities.

Bawack and Kamdjoug (2020) describe a model to explain the changes in students’ information behavior and the effect it has on their learning outcomes. Salubi, Ondari-Okemwa and Nekhwevha (2018) and Silva and Cavalcante (2019) analyze the process of searching for and obtaining information by users of the library of their respective universities. Lastly, Keiser (2016) conducted a self-assessment of informational literacy skills with 21 students of a Competitive Intelligence course, before and after taking the course. From this perspective, we can state that the aim of this study is innovative.

This article is organized into five sections. After this introduction, in the second section, we detail the theoretical framework. In the third section, the adopted methodology is described. In the fourth section, we present the obtained results, discussed in the light of the literature review. Finally, in the fifth section, we summarize the findings and present suggestions for future research.

Theoretical framework

Canclini (2010) and Rocha and Pereira (2009) argue that consumption goes beyond the mere purchase of goods, covering sociocultural aspects that emerge both from the interactions between consumers and from their relationship with the environment in which they live. In spite of disparities in access, it is a fact that consumption is increasingly mediated

by digital platforms (VAN DIJCK, 2013), “creating a global web of information, knowledge, and sharing” (OLIVEIRA; ALMEIDA, 2016, p. 418, free translation).

The choice of digital platforms for information consumption is a complex phenomenon, influenced by several factors (MARTÍNEZ-SILVEIRA; ODDONE, 2007). According to Wilson (2000), information search can range from formal systems to direct communication with other people. Within this context, information mediators, both human and organizational systems, play a crucial role in facilitating the access and effective use of information by users (SALUBI; ONDARI-OKEMWA; NEKHWEVHA, 2018; PONGRAC; ZORICA; DOMOVIĆ, 2022; SILVA; CAVALCANTE, 2019).

Specifically, regarding the organizational context, which is the focus of management students’ work, information plays an essential role in decision-making, contributing to operational efficiency and the development of innovative business processes (SADOWSKI, 2019; TREDINICK, 2023). According to Viana and Ferreira (2020), in the corporate sphere, precise and clear information is essential. It must be transmitted in such a way that the content is understood unambiguously, ensuring that the initial message is preserved in its integrity as it is passed on. To do so, the sources from which managers seek information must be reliable and up-to-date, providing verifiable data that can sustain decisions.

Viana and Mariano (2022) note that, despite being fundamental instruments for access to information, the actual efficiency of digital platforms is only achieved with the effective integration of different communication channels. This ensures that individual needs and expectations are met by promoting a convergence of content through the variety of platforms (JACKS *et al.*, 2011; JENKINS, 2009). Adikari *et al.* (2021) add that information has evolved into a dynamic state, which makes it essential for organizations to use these data to stand out in the market and drive innovation. However, Santos (2020, p. 429, free translation) warns that “the Internet has increased the availability of information, but has allowed the emergence of new ways of manipulating it.”

The effective use of data in an organization is not only limited to the accuracy and reliability of data, but also to the way they are integrated into decision-making processes (WALKER, 2015). Considering social and behavioral aspects that influence the use of information in the business environment significantly contributes to decision-making based on solid data and healthy informational practices (TREDIN-NICK, 2023). After all, according to Castells (2005), the current dialogue is contextualized in the era of the society of information and network connectivity, which are responsible for the generation, processing, and distribution of knowledge stored in the interconnected points of the networks.

The conception of organization as a network is not recent (CASTELLS, 2005). However, as described by Rossini *et al.* (2021), there is a “paradox” in the engagement in social media platforms and messaging applications, because although they can promote democratic discussions, they are also associated with the dissemination of unreliable information. The authors emphasize that it is common for individuals who disseminate false data to be corrected by members of their social media, although the effectiveness of these social corrections in changing erroneous beliefs cannot be quantified.

WhatsApp is an example of a dysfunctional information-sharing platform, in which users can pass on messages from one conversation to another, including to groups. The absence of a public feed, as found in other platforms, implies that tracking the content to its original source is not so straightforward, considering that the forwarded data do not contain metadata to identify where they came from (ROSSINI *et al.*, 2021). Nonetheless, the authors believe that closer relationships can be crucial to combating misinformation.

Furthermore, within this context of dysfunctional sharing of information, GenAI has the ability to create content in response to prompts, depending on deep-learning models, which is challenging in terms of governance due to its dynamic and evolutionary nature (FERRARI; VAN DIJCK; VAN DEN BOSCH, 2023). In this sense, the implementation

of control structures, policies, and clear guidelines is essential to ensure that AI is developed and used responsibly and ethically (FERRARI; VAN DIJCK; VAN DEN BOSCH, 2023; SANTAELLA, 2023). AI offers a wide range of features, including new strategies for optimizing the user experience (LESSA; BRESSAN JÚNIOR, 2024).

The user experience is an essential resource for analyzing information interactions on the Internet, as it provides an insight into how people interact with information and how these interactions are evaluated (O'BRIEN; LEBOW, 2013). In addition, Tubachi (2018) highlights the influence of the principle of least effort, that is, when searching for information, people tend to opt for the path that requires the least effort. Thus, even if they have skills to perform complex technical searches, users often prefer to use search methods and tools with which they are more familiar and that are easier to handle, aiming to obtain the desired results faster and with the least effort.

In the “era of instant and effortless connection” (BAUMAN, 2008, p. 135, free translation), algorithms are employed to customize and prioritize content according to users’ interests, select, and sort relevant information, as opposed to the manual method of data management (VETTEHEN; SCHAAP, 2023). Taking this into consideration, we refer to the studies of Cancilini (2021) on the relevance of agile information and the ability of instant connection, and of Bauman and Raud (2018) on the strategy of “multitasking,” which allows individuals, through a smartphone, to quickly access information wherever they are, optimizing their time (SORJ, 2003; ROCHA; PEREIRA; BARROS, 2014).

In short, it is noteworthy that technology facilitates diverse experiences, such as mobility, learning, communication, and interaction, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. Informational choices and information consumption are multidimensional phenomena influenced by a complex interaction between technological, social, behavioral, and organizational factors, shaping both access and effective use of information in contemporary societies.

Methodology

In this study, exploratory and descriptive research was used, with a qualitative approach, and, as a research technique, the survey was defined, following the indications of Prodanov and Freitas (2013) and Malhotra (2019). The questionnaire applied to the students of the Business Administration program of a College in the state of Rio Grande do Sul (Brazil) was adopted as a data collection method, with four questions being asked.

The first two close-ended questions aimed to characterize the respondent and, in these questions, it was possible to choose only one answer option. In the first question about age, the definitions adopted by UNESCO (ABRAMOVAY; CASTRO, 2006) and the Brazilian Youth Statute (BRASIL, 2013) were considered as the basis for the scale, according to which young people are those aged 15 to 29 years, and the Elderly Statute (BRASIL, 2003), which ensures special rights to people aged 60 years or over. Therefore, individuals from 30 to 59 years old were deemed adults, and those under 15 years old, children.

The second question addressed the gender of the respondent, with the options: Female, Male, Other. The following two questions were open-ended, and long answers were enabled in one or more paragraphs. The open-ended questions concerned: “1. Where and how do you search for and consume information/news?; 2. Justify the choice for this platform/medium.”

The non-probability sampling was defined by convenience (MALHOTRA, 2019), and students of the Market Research discipline were the sample factor. Data collection took place in the first and second half of 2022 and 2023, using the Google Forms tool. Data collection took place anonymously to ensure the privacy of the participants. In this period, 112 students answered the survey, 64% of whom aged from 15 to 29 years, and 36%, from 30 to 59 years. No responses were obtained from individuals under 15 years of age and those over 60 years of age. Regarding gender, 53% identified as female and 47%, male. These students belong to the “urban middle layers” (VELHO, 1988).

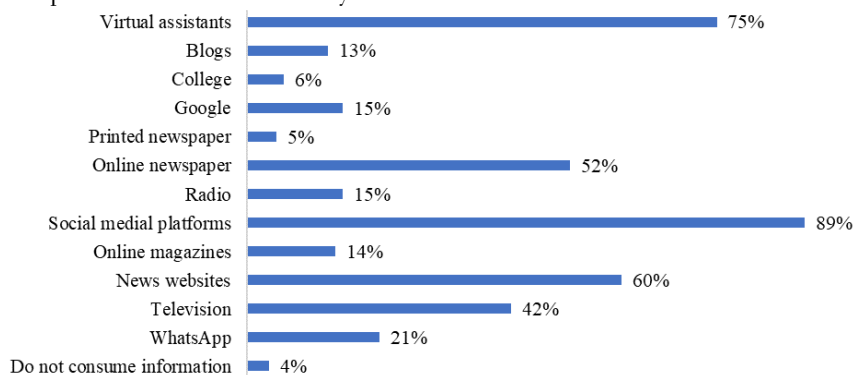
For the qualitative analysis of the collected data, the content analysis proposed by Bardin (2004) was adopted. This approach included the stages of pre-analysis, exploration of the material, and treatment and interpretation of the results, ensuring a deep and contextualized understanding of the participants' responses. The choice for this methodology allowed analyzing textual data, identifying emerging patterns and categories in the students' perceptions of the search for information.

Analysis and discussion of the results

According to the results, there was no difference in the provided answers between the demographic groups studied. Both young students (15-29 years old) and adults (30-59 years old) presented similar response patterns in the questions addressed in the questionnaire. Likewise, there were no variations in the responses according to the participants' gender identity. The absence of statistically significant differences in the participants' responses suggests that, in this specific study, age group and gender identity did not influence the opinions. This result can be attributed to the specific nature of the questions in the questionnaire, the university context shared between the participants, or other factors not investigated in this study.

Regarding the open-ended questions, as shown in Graph 1, we evidenced a wide variety of information platforms and media being used, which include both traditional media (television, 42%; radio, 15%; and printed newspaper, 5%) and online media. Among the latter, social media platforms emerge as the main medium, with 89% of respondents resorting to them to inform themselves, and 8% exclusively using them. The high frequency of mentions to social media platforms suggests that they play an increasingly important role in forming opinions and disseminating information (MONTEIRO, 2024).

Graph 1 – Where and how do you search for and consume information/news?



Regarding search engines, only Google was mentioned by 15% of respondents, which still monopolizes the global market of search engines (SOLLITTO; ALEJANDRO, 2022). Websites specialized in news (60%), online newspapers (52%), online magazines (14%), and specific blogs (13%), that is, platforms that can offer relevant and up-to-date information on specific topics, were also mentioned. In addition, 75% of the research participants identify virtual assistants as information sources; of these, 85% mentioned OK Google; 45%, Siri; 35%, Alexa; 31%, Lu Magalu (the virtual assistant of the Brazilian department store Magazine Luiza); 16%, ChatGPT; and 10%, Cortana.

It is worth noting that ChatGPT was mentioned only from 2023 onward, but has already achieved significant adherence. Ferrari, Van Dijck and Van Den Bosch (2023) and Santaella (2023) note that the effects resulting from the use of ChatGPT for obtaining information will certainly be felt. “The veneer of objectivity and language fluency can be appealing and strengthen the individualized interaction with information, creating the false idea that knowledge is made available completely” (SANTAELLA, 2023, p. 8, free translation).

The WhatsApp messaging application was mentioned by 21% of the student respondents, although it is not a news platform. Its presence in the research suggests that this platform plays a prominent role in the dissemination of news and in the formation of opinions. However,

according to Rossini *et al.* (2021), the dissemination of inappropriate information is a common phenomenon in WhatsApp. When specifically analyzing participants who mentioned WhatsApp, we verified that they also selected other platforms, demonstrating a preference for multiple information channels.

The college itself was mentioned by 6% of the respondents. Nevertheless, no one responded to the choice for the consumption of academic repositories (SciELO, Google Scholar, CAPES Journals Portal, etc.) and did not specifically mention the college library or e-books as well. As these students are not seniors, it can be inferred, as Pongrac, Zorica and Domović (2022) suggest, that libraries and databases are incorporated in order to meet only the demands of scientific research, being less used for other activities. However, the possible need to install specific readers to access some databases and e-books can influence the students' preference for other information resources that are more convenient and free of charge (SALUBI; ONDARI-OKEMWA; NEKHWEVHA, 2018).

In short, students are not limited to a single source, but access and consume a variety of channels, including social media platforms, conventional media outlets, and other forms of communication, corroborating studies conducted by Jenkins (2009), Jacks *et al.* (2011) and Viana and Mariano (2022). This consumption of information, as Canclini (2010) and Rocha and Pereira (2009) argue, goes beyond the simple search for data, encompassing sociocultural aspects that arise both in the interactions between consumers themselves and in their relationship with the digital environment in which they are inserted. In other words, as highlighted by Van Dijck (2013) and Oliveira and Almeida (2016), the choice of digital platforms creates a global network of knowledge consumption and sharing.

Thus, the emphasis on the consumption of information is maintained and strengthened from the sociocultural and digital perspective proposed by the aforementioned authors.

Nonetheless, 4% of respondents pointed out that they do not seek information, justifying this choice based on the saturation of news in other

means of access, ideological distrust in information channels, and mere disinterest, according to the following reports:

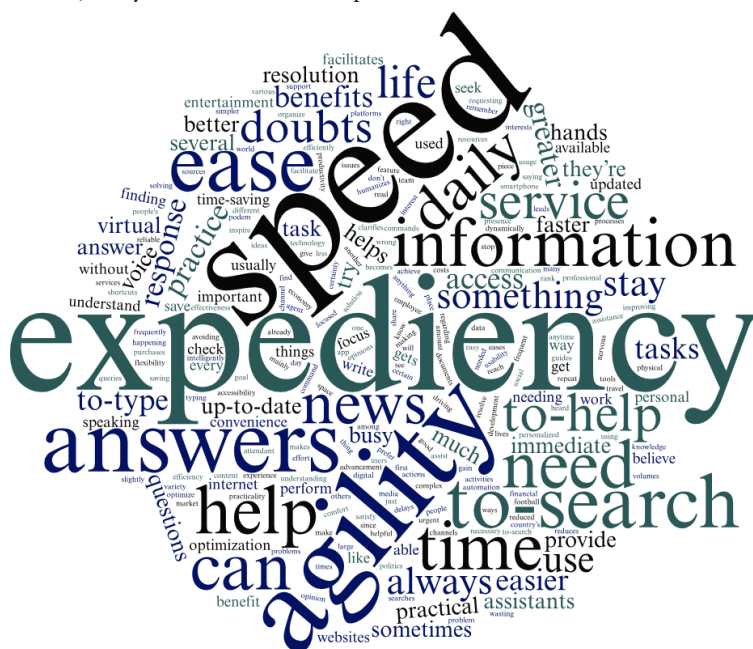
Because, from my point of view, there's no need for some news to be reported several times, this ends up making me anxious, 'cause I've already heard it somewhere else. As for the TV, I can't stand still for a long time doing the same thing for several days at the same time.

I rarely watch the news, I think that every information channel is ideologically contaminated, so I try to filter it as much as I can, searching for primary sources, to better know the facts themselves.

I don't like the news.

For the remaining 96% of the respondents of the question “Justify the choice for this platform/medium,” the attributes of speed, ease of use, and efficiency were mentioned as justifications for the choice of platforms/media, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 – Justify the choice for this platform/medium.



The reasons most mentioned by students include agility and expediency in obtaining information, accessibility and convenience provided by mobile devices, greater amount of information available, and saving time and effort in searching for information:

- Agility and expediency: students value the speed in obtaining information and the ease of use of the platforms. They often mention the ability to do quick searches, get immediate answers, and use voice commands. The search for quick and convenient information is related to the network society (CASTELLS, 2005), fluidity (BAUMAN, 2008), and the relevance of agile information (CANCLINI, 2021). We can also mention Van Dijck, Poell and Waal (2018), who address the culture of connectivity and the platform society, in which expediency and agility of access and consumption are essential to integrate digital media into everyday life;
- Accessibility and convenience: the availability of information on mobile devices and the ability to access platforms anytime and anywhere are deemed important for the students. These factors connect with the idea of liquid life (BAUMAN, 2008), characterized by fluidity and constant connectivity (VAN DIJCK, 2013). This resonates with the answers that highlight the use of voice commands and accessibility via smartphones, facilitating constant interaction with information;
- Greater amount of information: the possibility of consuming a wide range of content and different sources is valued. In this sense, digital platforms are seen as a comprehensive source of information, allowing students to find a variety of perspectives and relevant content. They provide instant and easy access to a large amount of data. The search for various perspectives and relevant content is related to information inequality (CANCLINI, 2010) and the need to navigate in a complex informational environment;
- Saving time and effort: digital platforms are described as tools that optimize daily tasks, save time and effort in searching for information, for example, avoiding the need to type or search across

multiple sources. The search for efficiency in the consumption of information is related to the optimization of time in a fast-paced world (SORJ, 2003; ROCHA; PEREIRA; BARROS, 2014; BAUMAN, 2008; BAUMAN; RAUD, 2018; TUBACHI, 2018). Platforms that offer quick answers and save time are valued not only for their convenience, but also for aligning with the efficiency expectations of contemporary consumers (O'BRIEN; LEBOW, 2013; LESSA; BRESSAN JÚNIOR, 2024).

However, the reliability of the obtained information was not mentioned by the respondents, despite the importance of choosing reliable platforms and media to ensure the accuracy and veracity of the information (MARTÍNEZ-SILVEIRA; ODDONE, 2007; ROSSINI *et al.*, 2021; TREDINNICK, 2023). It is worth mentioning that the search for and consumption of information should be done responsibly, focusing on verifying the reliability of the sources and searching for different perspectives.

Finally, we verified the complexity of information choice and the influence of various behavioral, social, and technological factors in choosing platforms and media for the consumption of information (WILSON, 2000; MARTÍNEZ-SILVEIRA; ODDONE, 2007). Among these factors, the tendency not to restrict oneself to a single platform, evidencing a diversified behavior in the search for information (JENKINS, 2009; JACKS *et al.*, 2011; ROSSINI *et al.*, 2021; VIANA; MARIANO, 2022). The search for immediate and easily-accessible answers is related to the need to stay informed and updated in a complex and constantly-changing world (VAN DIJCK, 2013; OLIVEIRA; ALMEIDA, 2016; TUBACHI, 2018).

In addition, it is essential that (future) managers can discern the relevance and accuracy of the information they receive. This includes a solid understanding of the principles of data analysis and the ability to critically question sources and data. Effective communication also depends on the ability to present complex information in a simplified way, without

losing the essence of the content (WALKER, 2015; SADOWSKI, 2019; VIANA; FERREIRA, 2020; ROSSINI *et al.*, 2021; TREDINNICK, 2023; VETTEHEN; SCHAAP, 2023).

Final considerations

In the constantly evolving business world, professional updating is crucial to excel in career and achieve professional goals. Staying informed about the latest trends, technologies, and market practices not only extends technical knowledge, but also strengthens interpersonal skills, critical eye, and strategic thinking. These are key elements for professional success, shaping managers prepared for the dynamic challenges of today's business environment.

In this study, we identified which platforms and media are chosen by management students to search for and consume information. In addition, we sought to understand the reasons for these choices, providing insights into data access and consumption by future managers. According to the results, digital platforms play a crucial role in the process of knowledge acquisition and professional updating of future managers. As per the theoretical analysis, we corroborate that the choice of information platforms and media is related to social, cultural, and technological factors that permeate contemporary society. Understanding these factors is paramount to understand how students search for and consume information, and how digital platforms influence this process.

Based on the analyses carried out, we conclude that the choice for certain platforms or media is mainly justified by their ability to provide quick and practical information. Ease of access, variety of content available, and time savings are the main benefits perceived by students. These aspects not only meet the need for immediate information, but also facilitate learning and decision-making. In short, in this study, we showed that there were no significant differences in the responses provided among the 112 participating university students, regardless of age or gender identity.

Unfortunately, students did not take into account the credibility and timeliness of information from the consumed sources. The importance of having access to current, relevant, and truthful data is undeniable. Therefore, we recommend that the search for and consumption of information be carried out responsibly, focusing on verifying the reliability of sources and searching for different perspectives. Diversifying information sources is essential for a comprehensive and balanced understanding of the studied topics, while GenAI tools should be used with caution, without replacing critical sense and individual data analysis.

For future studies, it is suggested to investigate the specific functionalities of the platforms and how they influence the process of searching for and consuming information in different contexts. Investigating how these platforms can be used to improve teaching and learning in management also represents a promising research topic. By understanding the methods of searching for and consuming information of managers in training, we can improve the tools and resources that are provided to them, ensuring that they remain well-informed and able to face the complexities of the business environment.

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Research data availability: All datasets were generated or analyzed in the present study.

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