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Communicating in a mobile, connected world: the impact of digital transformation on the University of Aveiro

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Abstract

The main objective of the present work is to analyse the impact of digital transformation on the University of Aveiro (UA), with a special focus on the communication platforms and tools that allow students and staff a faster and easier access to information, as well as to a wide range of services such as, for example, cloud housing/hosting, information storage space or academic software licensing. Furthermore, with the objective of better understanding what were the most significant changes introduced in recent years regarding UA's digital communication strategy, this work shall also present the results of an interview to a representative of the Communications, Image and Public Relations Services.

Keywords

Digital Transformation, eLearning platforms, higher education, organizational communication, information display apps

Introduction

We are living in times of major change, and it is happening at an exponential rate. According to ASUG (2016), there's a technology-enabled revolution occurring right now that knows no borders and seems to have no limits. From neuro-technological brain enhancements and genetic editing to intelligent robots and everyday technological devices, we are amidst a shift that is changing the way we live, work and communicate with each other (World Economic Forum, n.d.). By combining the use of new equipment, platforms, networks and systems (Herbert, 2017), DT is leading us to a new world where everything is connected, and information is displayed through digital channels that allow organisations' key stakeholders to access it ever more easily and conveniently.

According to Herbert (2017), DT presents the following advantages :

✓ more profitable business models;
✓ more efficient operating processes;
✓ greatest access to markets;
✓ improved offers to users;
✓ new sources of revenue.

DT statistics (2018)

- 55% of start-ups and 38% of traditional enterprises have already adopted a DT strategy;

- 89% of enterprises have plans to adopt or have already adopted a digital-first business strategy. As shown in Figure 1, services, financial services and healthcare are in the lead of that process:
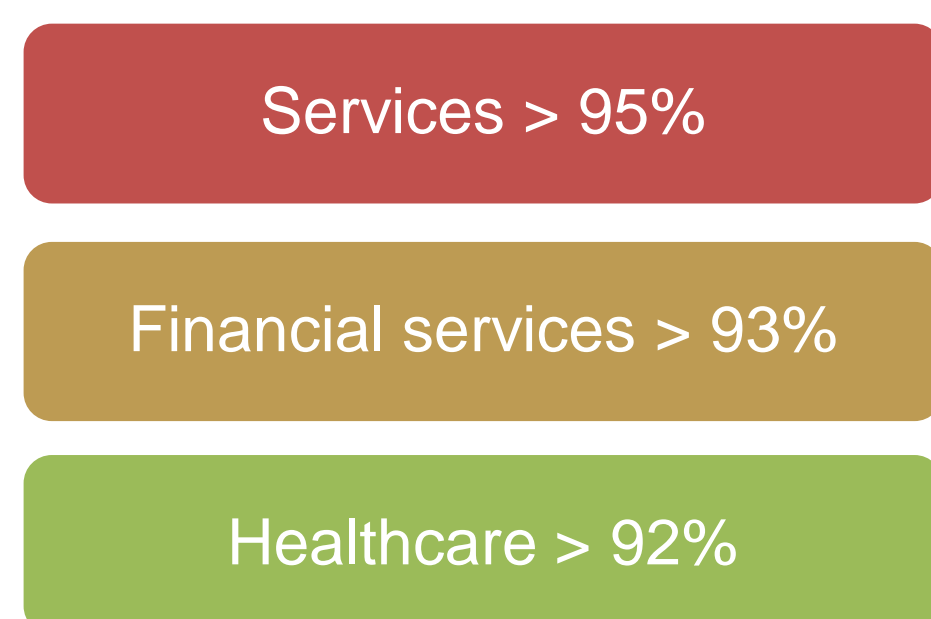
Services > 95%

Financial services > 93%

Healthcare > 92%

Fig.1 Main sectors adopting a digital-first business strategy
Source: Business Infographics, https://bit.ly/2QknOhM

Fundamental domains of DT

For a successful DT strategy, literature suggests (e.g., Rogers, 2016) that it is necessary to acquire expertise in five pivotal areas (see Figure 2):

Fig.2 The five domains of digital transformation
Source: Quint and Patiño (2016)

Customers' behaviour is changing dramatically with the adoption of new technologies and companies must adapt to that reality. Due to this new trend, the **competition** between organisations increased and they need to analyse various distribution media, sales channels and price points for their products. The way companies produce, manage and use information sets the tone for their success, as **data** plays a significant role in a business operating system.
A company's objective is also to be in the forefront, so it must be **innovative**. Digital technologies have become a great tool to test ideas or products more easily and to gain market feedback faster. The final domain of DT concerns the **value** that businesses give to their customers.

DT on the University of Aveiro

Since its foundation, in 1973, much progress has been made in terms of communication strategy within the University of Aveiro (UA), namely by its *Communications, Image and Public Relations Services* (CIPRS) section,

which is responsible for the press and communication consultancy, web management and communication, public relations and marketing. Moreover, it also seeks to understand the needs and preferences of its key stakeholders, who, with the advent of the digital era, expect contents and information to be constantly updated in different media.
DT has also revealed itself crucial for a better understanding of the different audiences' profiles, especially students, a generation who has known the internet since birth and is, therefore, particularly reliant on phones and apps. With this in mind, UA constantly analyses students' preferences and the collected data allows the continuous improvement of the different online communication tools available to UA's academic community.

This new paradigm also impacts on staff professional skills, who are now required to be tech-savvy and available to constantly acquire new competences to keep up with the evolving reality. In an interview, a representative of the CIPRS section refers it is "imperative to learn how to work with new IT tools, particularly with video and image editing, with programmes such as Photoshop and Adobe Premier, as well as with Google Applications."

Students' main online platforms

From cloud housing/hosting, information storage space to academic software licensing, the range of technological services offered to the UA's community is wide. Besides these, PACO, eLearning and the UA mobile platforms are also an important part of students' academic life.

PACO is an academic portal with functionalities for students, faculty and administrative staff (Figure 3). Students can, for example, enroll in courses, sign up for exams or consult their schedule.

Fig.3 PACO
Source: https://paco.ua.pt/

Among other features, UA's **eLearning** platform (Figure 4) allows students to access each course work area, a space where they can consult information, download course materials, check their grades or submit assignments, etc.
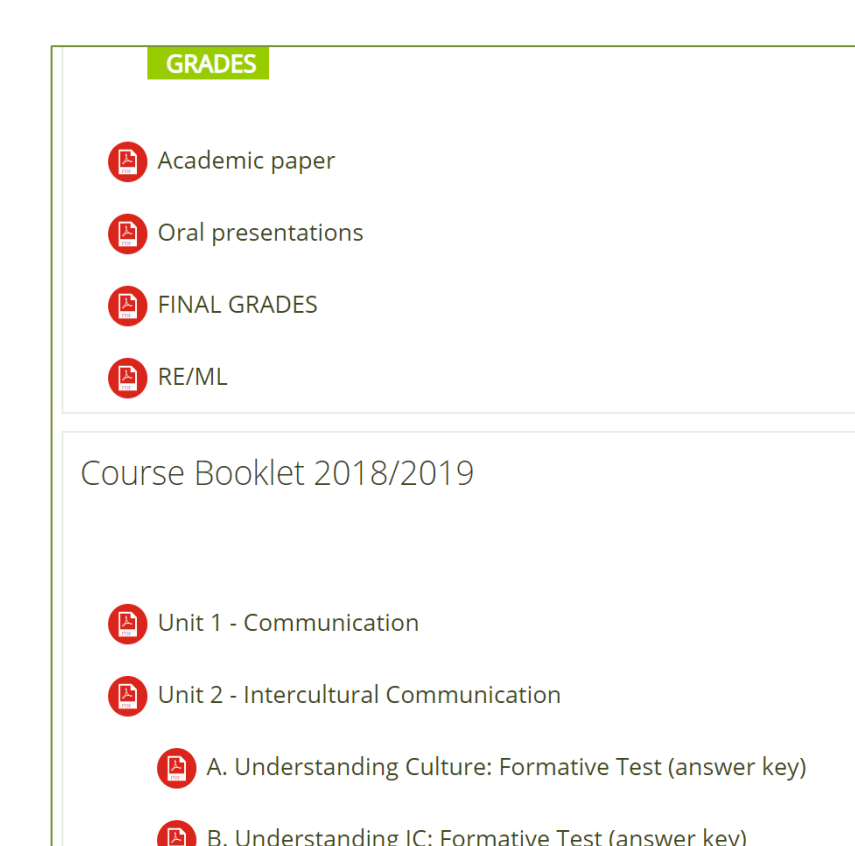

Fig.4 A course's work area in the eLearning platform
Source: https://elearning.ua.pt/

Fig.5 Main page of UA mobile
Source: UA mobile

UA mobile (Figure 5) is an app that displays a multitude of information relevant to students, such as course enrollment status, class schedule, exam sign-ups, grades, tuitions, academic news or the canteen menu, among others.

Conclusions

DT has changed the way each and everyone of us communicates, making it an easier and more effective process. Currently, there are many online platforms and apps that facilitate communication and the performance of organisations. DT represents, therefore, an opportunity for companies to become more competitive. UA, too, seeks to adapt its DT strategy to students' behaviour and preferences through innovative communication forms and tools. Nevertheless, and even though the eLearning platform can be consulted in English, PACO and UAmobile only display information in Portuguese; improving the language feature would be of great value considering that the UA aims to cater to even more international students.

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