

Social work in the face of emerging technologies: A technological acceptance study in 13 countries

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Abstract

Significant technological advances have taken place in recent years, especially in ICT, which are rapidly transforming the different professions, including social work. We want to verify the degree of technological acceptance of social workers at the international level and how the relationship between professional practice and the use of new technological possibilities is established. For this purpose we applied a specialized questionnaire and Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) scale, to 1144 social workers from 13 countries. A high degree of technological acceptance is detected; a clear identification between professional practice, the use of technological advances, and their connection with NASW standards.

Keywords

ICT, practice, social work, technology acceptance model, telesocial work

Introduction

It is evident that social work, as a scientific discipline and as a profession, has managed to survive social transformations, providing adequate responses to the problems of our societies, and adapting to prevailing social changes and dynamics. It is a discipline that has been able to respond to the demands that society and its times have made upon it. Social work, therefore, is a field with the capacity to adjust and mutate to the shifting research and intervention needs imposed on it, without losing its essence, striving for the constant development of its theoretical foundations and research. A defining characteristic of social work is that it is a scientific discipline with certain similarities to medical science, that is, the theoretical knowledge it generates seeks to be applied to intervention on social reality.

When we talk about new technologies, we are referring to the latest technological developments and their applications. For social work, this reality is markedly evident, and it is already difficult to

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understand our interventions and research without the connections and access to information that networks and new technologies, in general, afford us. For the National Association of Social Workers and the British Association of Social Work (NASW and BASW, 2005: 18–20), these new technologies represent a mode of communication and information by which we can acquire, transmit or store it. For this, we have at our disposal computing and its various formats and media, smartphones, personal digital assistants and a long list of other technologies. In any case, they comprise a set of techniques and procedures that give the social worker, through hardware and software or telecommunications media, the ability to coordinate activities, decisions and choices.

New technologies entail quantitative and qualitative changes at every social level; shifts which, obviously, must be integrated into social work and its functions. Thus, in 2005, a document was drafted on technology as it relates to the practice of social work (NASW and BASW, 2005: 3), to govern any electronically mediated activity used in social work, to ensure that it is as effectual and ethical as possible. This document contains, in Rule 9, about Skills for Practice, the following guidelines: Social workers should use technology to inform and mobilize communities to support policies that will benefit individuals and groups; social workers should advocate for the adoption and use of relevant technologies that enhance communities' well-being; social workers should stay up to date on technology to improve the quality of programmes and the rendering of services; social workers should make an effort to remain informed about the dynamics of online relationships, the pros and cons of non-face-to-face interactions, and the ways in which technology-based social work can be conducted safely and appropriately; social workers who conduct, evaluate, disseminate or implement research using technological approaches must do so in a manner that ensures ethical credibility and participants' informed consent; when using or providing supervision and consultation through technological means, social work supervisors and supervisees should observe those standards applicable to face-to-face supervisory relationships, and be competent in the technologies used (NASW and BASW, 2005: 11–17). In any case, social work can utilize technology in many ways, such as drawing on databases at our workplaces, and software in the use and storage of information generated by the discipline. This may involve case planning, evaluations and so on, which can all be done electronically (Christenson, 2019).

The use of technology also changes social work. For example, we can provide clients or users with remote (not in person) services. Of particular interest is social work's potential to reach traditionally isolated, dispersed areas, in rural, difficult-to-access locations; and even social work's capacity to access networks of resources, information, contact with public and private entities, and so on. According to Belluomini (2019), there are three approaches to the process of integrating technology into the practice of social work: proactive (current technologies are used to apply it to different areas of professional intervention), reactive (a critical thinking about technology stands out) and rejected (decision against the use of technology because it is contraindicated). In any case, Bryan et al. (2015) see the use of emerging technologies as a cost-effective solution to overcome social isolation. In the view of McCarty and Clancy (2002: 153), almost anything a social worker does face-to-face could, theoretically, be done online. The use of emerging technologies by social workers has been studied by Mishna et al. (2019) in a comparative study between Canada ($n = 2609$) and the United States ($n = 1225$). Findings indicate that informal information and communications technology (ICT) use by social workers is ubiquitous and consistent across both countries. Older and more experienced practitioners, and social workers in private practice settings and who provide psychotherapy were among the highest users. We should bear in mind that technology is also used directly in the treatment of clients, and can offer us infinite possibilities. We can use video cameras for everything from follow-up visits with clients to conducting remote interviews. We can also use text and email for service updates and to schedule appointments, and we can use social media for updates. As Christenson points out, we can even make use of Facebook or other

networks to support or facilitate our tasks. We can also use technology to understand that which clients use, and, especially, how they use it. This is important to appreciate how it can affect them. For example, teens may use various forms of technology to bully, especially social media; and adults may have strong emotional reactions to things they find online. Thus, social workers need to be up to date to comprehend how technology affects their clientele (Christenson, 2019).

In this regard, Reamer (2015b) tells us that different electronic technologies have transformed both the practice of social work and education in the field. Contemporary social workers can serve clients through online counselling, telephone counselling, video counselling, cyber (avatar) therapy, self-guided web-based interventions, electronic social media, email and texting. The introduction of various forms of digital, online and other forms of electronic social services has also given rise to a wide range of ethical problems that the social worker has to deal with: informed consent by the client, client privacy and confidentiality, dual boundaries and relationships, conflicts of interest, professional competence, records and documentation, and collegial relationships (Reamer, 2015a).

Some studies indicate that the Internet and ICTs open a new stage for the intervention of social workers, as for example, Mishna et al. (2017) analysing it from Clinical Social Work, Chan and Holosko (2016), from specific social work interventions, or López (2014), on its ethical connotations. Some researchers show that the relationship between social work and new technologies is very beneficial, as it allows for the improvement of professional practice and the generation of new and better interventions at all levels of the profession. Here, we can highlight the contributions of Hill and Shaw (2011), Del Fresno and López-Peláez (2013), Warburton et al. (2014), Mishna et al. (2014) or Dellor et al. (2015). More recently, we find research by De Lucas and D'Antonio (2020) on the usefulness of ICTs for social work with young people; Fuente and Martín (2019) on social work and older people; Hidalgo and Lima (2018), who demonstrated their importance at European level; Raya (2018), who showed the effectiveness of new technologies as an element that makes social inclusion possible; or Baker et al. (2018), who apply the usefulness of new technologies in social work through Participatory Action Research (PAR).

Other researchers find critical elements in the relationship between social work and the use of new technologies. For example, Gillingham (2016) claims that it generates managerialism; Hill and Shaw (2011) linked it to the perception of ICT as a management, rather than a social work, tool or even that it can make social workers passive and powerless in the face of technological change.

If we want to know whether a professional group is receptive to and benefits from the use of technological tools, we can turn to the TAM (Technology Acceptance Model). The TAM is a theory that draws from disciplines such as social psychology, and which establishes the degree of acceptance of a society when faced with the introduction of new technologies. Its direct precedent is Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action (TRA). This model is based on the assumption that, through analysis, it is possible to infer whether a society is more predisposed to incorporate novelties or whether, on the contrary, it is conservative. It is therefore a tool that can be used to find out a society's expectations of what a technology brings (Davis, 1989). TAM is an instrument proposed by Davis (1989) and Davis et al. (1989, 1992) and that has been used in several studies of a very diverse nature, with adaptations to Spanish, such as those by Sandí (2019) about the pedagogical practice of teachers; Bel and Bel (2019), who measured cooperative education through Google; Quicaño et al. (2019), who applied the model to technological services offered by hotel companies; Pereyra-Rodríguez et al. (2018) on the intention to use the technologies in a health institution; Cózar-Gutiérrez et al. (2016) on prospective teachers according to their learning styles; and Abad (2011) in a comparison of Google versus Moodle. The TAM is the most widely applied model of user acceptance and use of technology. Hendrickson et al. (1993) found high reliability and good internal consistency. TAM can be used to measure whether a population group is

receptive to the use of new technologies; we can find the published studies of Castiblanco et al. (2021), where the authors study the benefits of technologies for farmers in the improvement of farming techniques; Siyal et al. (2021), who used TAM to analyse the factors that hinder the use of online shopping by foreigners and their behaviour in this regard; or the case of Mousa et al. (2021), who come to demonstrate the benefits of e-banking in its implementation in the Iraqi population. And, in another way, TAM also can be used to measure whether people are receptive to the use of a particular technology, such as a particular software or App (Moodle), or a particular technical support (iPad; Marangunić and Granić, 2014; Turner, 2016). This technology acceptance measurement tool has had three versions, the last one in 2008 is called TAM 3 (Venkatesh and Bala, 2008). There are other alternative models to TAM, such as the MPT Model (Scherer, 2005), more focused on the outcomes of technology use, or the HMSAM model (Fathema et al., 2015), ideal for measuring users' intrinsic motivations, such as online gaming, virtual worlds, online shopping, and learning or education. These alternative models have not been used in this study as they are not adapted to study the research object and hypotheses.

TAM is an instrument that consists of 15 Likert-type questions, with seven response options, ranging from a value of 1 = 'extremely unlikely/disagree' to 7 = 'extremely probable/agree'. The 15 items allow us to measure five areas related to technological acceptance: perceived utility (four items), perceived ease of use (three items), perceived enjoyment (three items), attitude towards use (three items), and intention to use it (two items).

However, for Gillingham (2013), after a study in the United Kingdom and Australia, it shows that the use of these technologies, and especially their implementation, can prevent the provision of services in social work. As we have indicated before, social workers may be reluctant to use these technologies, or to face unexpected consequences. Similarly, Watling and Rogers argue that the Internet is a reflection of current patterns of exclusion and marginalization. One example is the barriers to accessing digital resources. Some of these barriers include excessive costs, lack of skills and access to training, and poor fit between design and use with disadvantaged populations (Watling and Rogers, 2012: 7). As we see, social work's relationship with these technologies can also be difficult at times.

Based on the above points, a research study was carried out in order to gauge social workers' degree of technological acceptance at an international level, and to examine how the link between professional practice and the use of new technological possibilities is established. For this, we proceed with the following hypothesis: social workers will exhibit a high degree of technological acceptance because they detect important advantages offered by the use of emerging technologies for their professional practice.

Methodology

Participants

Based on an initial survey of 6785 social workers from 13 countries (universe), through the professional network LinkedIn, which has been used by different scientific disciplines to rigorously access samples of professionals, as in studies by Davis et al. (2020) or Hartman and Barber (2020). The following inclusion criteria were applied to this universe: (1) Accreditation of one's status as social workers and (2) working as a social worker, or having worked as a social worker in the last year. The exclusion criteria were the following: (a) Not having had experience as a social worker, (b) not certifying this link in a legal way, and/or (c) being a non-contracted worker, such as an intern, student trainee, or similar. At this point, we did a screening of the initial universe, and ultimately had 5802 subjects, to whom the questionnaire was sent through Google Forms. After

obtaining a response rate of 19.7 percent, we had a final sample of 1144 social workers, 78.5 percent being women. The professionals were from 13 countries, the majority from Spain (52.9%), this being the study's initial country of origin, but there were also professionals from other European countries (France 8.2%, the United Kingdom 9.3%, Greece 6.2%, Italy 4.8%, Turkey 0.4%), the Americas (the United States 0.5%, Brazil 2.5%, Chile 1.5%, Ecuador 0.9%, Argentina 3.5% and Peru 3.4%), and other regions of the planet (Zimbabwe 0.2%). The predominant age range was 26–40 (57.6%), followed by 41–60 (27.8%). More than 65 percent of the sample comprised people with a social work degree acquired 5 years ago or above, and more than 50 percent had 5 or more years of experience as social workers.

More than 56 percent of the sample had educational levels higher than those necessary to practise as social workers (Postgraduate, Expert or Master's 50.7%; Doctorate 6.3%). Around 70 percent were professionals who were working at the time of the survey, most of them as employees (64.9%). Regarding the context of their careers, 41 percent worked in the public sector, and the rest at private for-profit or non-profit entities. The main intervention areas and groups were Seniors (17.4%), Community Social Services (14.6%), Minors (11.8%) and Health (11.1%).

The subjects of the sample belonged to different fields of intervention of social work, with all groups: children, adolescents, family, elderly people, gender violence, prison population, homeless people, public and private social services and a wide variety of public and private services and programmes; and of all levels: case, group and community organization social work. What they all had in common was free access to the basic technological tools of social work, and access to the Internet and technological resources in general. There was no limitation in the technological access.

Instruments

To test the hypothesis, a specialized questionnaire of 27 variables was designed, together with use of the TAM, with a sample of 1144 social workers from 13 countries. The questionnaire was administered in two languages, Spanish and English (the questionnaire was adapted by a native translator, and subsequently tested by a group of 25 bilingual social workers, to check its correct use), using Google Forms, and distributed through the international professional network LinkedIn to subjects identified in legal way as social workers. The instrument does not exclude any questions; includes the entire TAM, adding other questions for the analysis of the socio-demographic profile, and about the relationship between technology and social work, and about advantages of the use of new technologies and social work. The research was carried out in the first quarter of 2019. The instrument featured very high reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of $\alpha = .950$.

The variables analysed were the following:

- Socio-demographic variables: Sex, age, nationality, years holding social work degree, years of experience as a social worker, employment status, professional context, maximum educational level and type of entity where he or she works. These variables were used for the description of the sample and for analysis and correlation with the rest of the variables, and were obtained through the applied questionnaire.
- Degree of technological acceptance: Through the TAM. This scale measures the following five categories: Perceived utility, perceived ease of use, perceived enjoyment, attitude towards use and intention to use it. The instrument in Spanish featured a reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of $\alpha = .942$ (Fernández, 2017). The scale, as in other TAM research, has been slightly adapted to integrate the 'social work' questions so that they are more understandable to respondents.

- Relationship between technology and social work: A total of six items were used that measure different aspects of the relationship between technology and social work, making use of the guidelines established by the NASW. They were obtained through the applied questionnaire.
- Advantages of the use of new technologies and social work: A total of 27 items were used to describe and detect the advantages of the use of new technologies in social work. They were obtained through the applied questionnaire.

Procedure

The study was carried out from 2019 to 2020, and in accordance with the Social Work Code of Ethics and that of the International Federation of Social Workers, and Organic Law 3/2018 of 5 December on the Protection of Personal Data and the safeguarding of digital rights. The following procedure was followed:

First, a brief adaptation of the vocabulary of the TAM scale is made, as is done in other studies, to adjust it to social workers, clarifying concepts such ‘perceived enjoyment’ and others.

Second, the sample selection was carried out, as described previously. Due to the characteristics of the study, no official approval by any institution was required.

Third, the questionnaire was administered through Google Forms, connecting with the sample (with a selection of profiles based on their education) through LinkedIn. We applied IP response control to prevent duplication. The response time for the questionnaire ranged from 5 to 10 minutes.

Fourth, the data obtained through Google Forms were transferred directly to an Excel document, which required recoding to the 27 variables (continuous) used and subsequent export to IBM SPSS.

Fifth, the data obtained were worked on in Excel and analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 computer program. Frequency analysis, correlation analysis (to find out the significance, Pearson’s bilateral correlation of the 27 variables was calculated), bivariate analyses about participants, the verification of significant and non-significant variables through contingency tables, and estimation of the instrument’s reliability (Cronbach’s alpha) were applied.

Results

In relation to the bivariate analysis of the sample, we can observe that there is a clear Pearson correlation ($p < .005$, $\chi^2 = 0.174$) between a high technological acceptance score (TAM) and years of experience as a social worker, that is, the more experience, the higher the technological acceptance. Other factors such as age, gender or degree status do not provide statistical correlation data. A comparison of this correlation by country shows that there are some differences according to geographical contexts. For example, Technology Acceptance in relation to experience as a social worker is higher in European countries and the United States than in other regions.

If we look for a little more detail in the analysis, we find that there is no significant difference in high technology acceptance (TAM) scores, and gender (male 80.7% and female 78.8%). In reference to the age of the sample, all subjects aged 18–60 years obtained high scores of technological acceptance (TAM) above 78 percent. But in the subjects aged +60, the score only reached 50 percent. It is seen that this age group has the most problems with technological acceptance. These data are repeated with great similarity between the different countries in the sample, although, in

Table 1. Technology acceptance model and the demographics aspects.

		Number of subjects with elevated TAM	% TAM
Gender	Male	199	80.7
	Female	708	78.8
Age	18–25	119	78.9
	26–40	517	78.3
	41–60	263	82.5
	+60	16	50
Years of experience as social workers	5 years	445	78.9
	5–10 years	143	78.2
	11–15 years	120	83.4
	16–20 years	72	75
	+20 years	151	95
Degree status	Degree in social work	390	79
	Postgraduate, expert or master's	469	80.8
	Doctorate	48	66.7

TAM: Technology Acceptance Model.

Source: Authors.

reference to the population above 60 years, a somewhat greater rejection of the use of new technologies has been detected in Central and South American countries, and in Turkey, Greece and Zimbabwe.

However, the data tell us that the longer they have been working as social workers (we have described this in the correlations), the higher the technological acceptance (TAM) of those subjects who have been working for more than 20 years (95%).

In reference to the degree status, the subjects most critical of technological acceptance have been those with the most training, the doctors, who obtained 66.7 percent of high technological acceptance (TAM), below the rest of the groups.

For the analysis of the results, we will begin with the degree of technological acceptance, through the TAM, a scale that may be explained by reference to its five categories:

1. **Perceived utility:** This category was measured using four variables, described in Figure 1. As we can see from the results shown, the perceived utility results for the sample clearly indicate the respondents' acknowledgement of the utility of emerging technologies in social work. In total, 69.4 percent indicated that the use of emerging technologies during interventions will help to improve them, 75 percent that they will also bolster their social work knowledge, 66 percent that these technologies are useful in social work and 80.6 percent that their performance as a social worker would improve thanks to the use of technologies.
2. **Ease of use:** This category was measured using the three variables described in Figure 2. The 'Perceived ease of use' results confirm that emerging technologies are viewed as easily applicable to social work. In fact, the respondents considered the use of emerging technologies to be something fun (66%), not a problem (73.6%), and that learning these technologies is clear and understandable (73.6%).

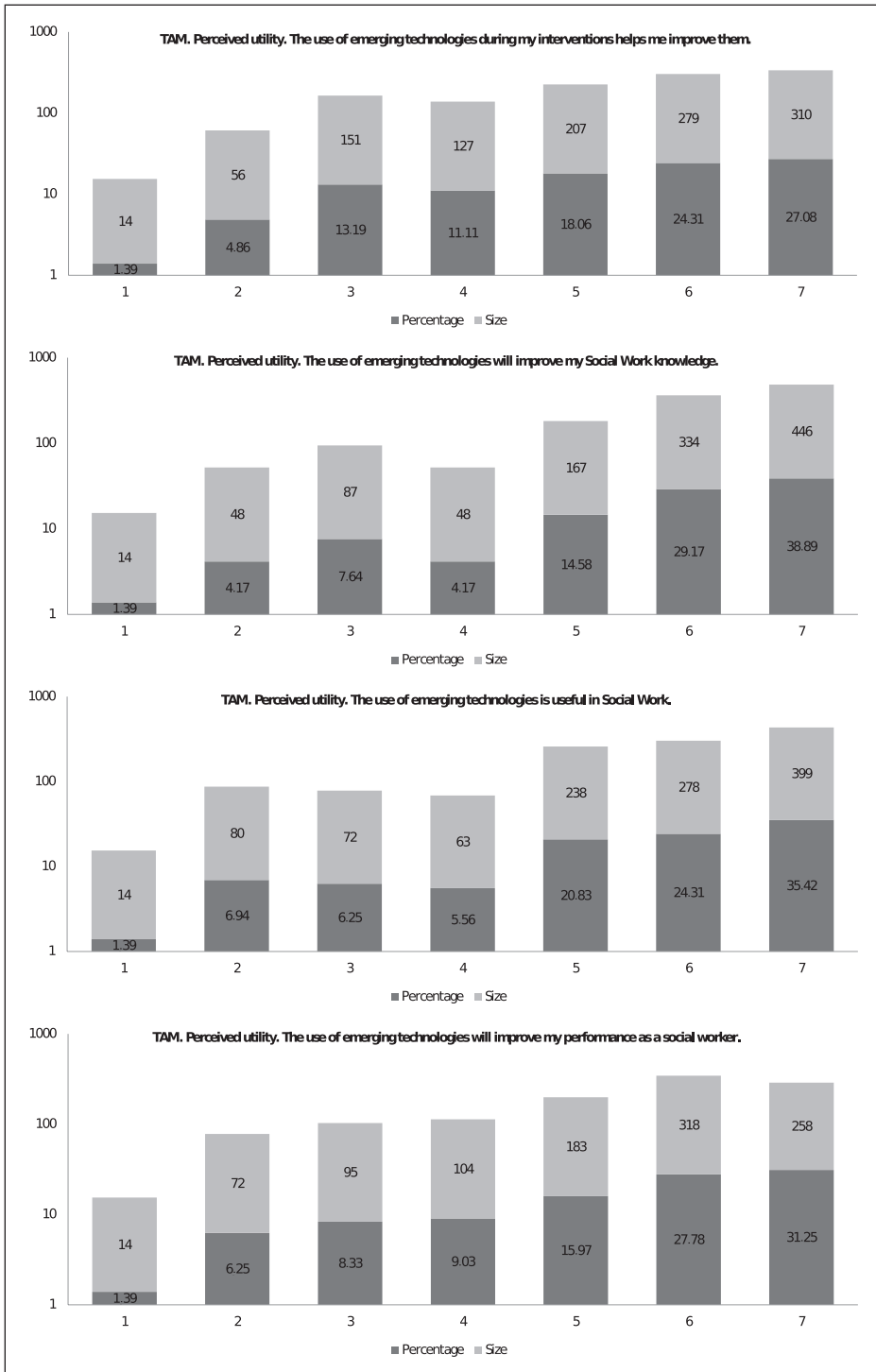


Figure I. TAM. Perceived usefulness.

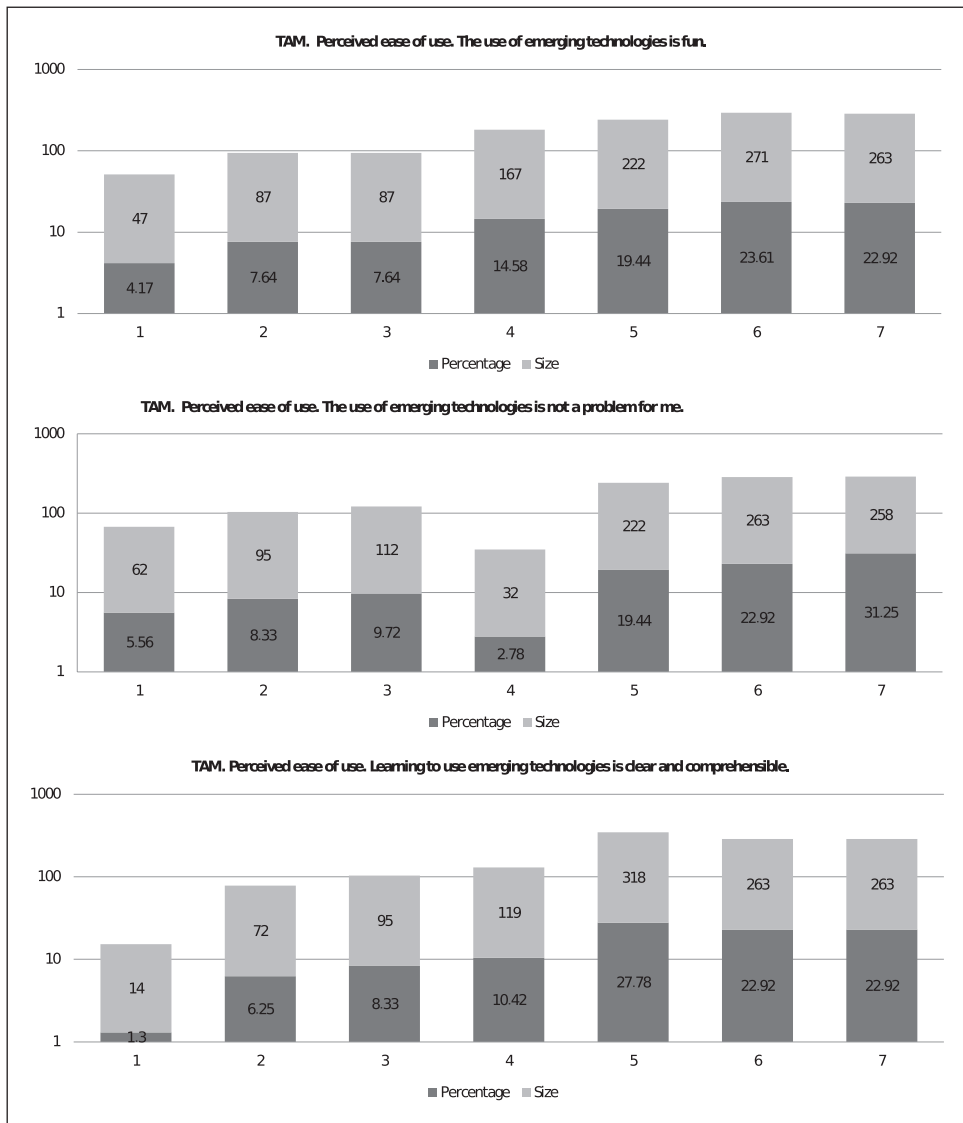


Figure 2. TAM. Ease of use.

3. Perceived enjoyment: This category was measured using the three variables appearing in Figure 3. As we can see, there is also a relationship between ‘Perceived enjoyment’ and the use of emerging technologies by social workers. In relation to the three variables analysed, the respondents expressed that these technologies are fun for social workers (61.1%), they enjoy the use of these technologies (68.1%), and that these technologies allow them to learn new things in social work (75.7%).
4. Attitude towards use: This category was measured using the three variables appearing in Figure 4. ‘Attitude towards use’ was positive from the perspectives of the social workers, as 64.6 percent indicated that the use of emerging technologies makes social work more

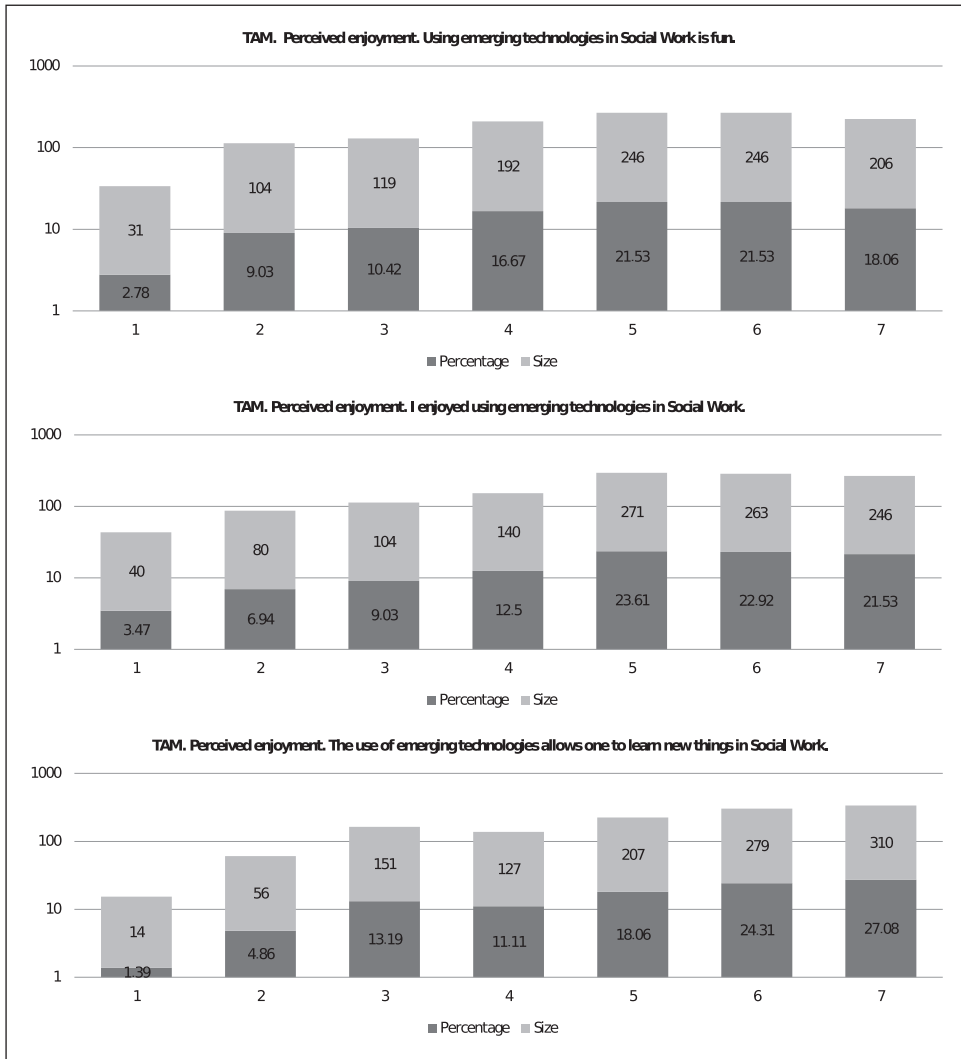


Figure 3. TAM. Perceived enjoyment.

interesting, 63.9 percent that they have not been bored by the use of technologies and 81.9 percent that the use of emerging technologies in social work is a good idea.

- Intention to use it: This category was measured using the two variables described in Figure 5.

In general, we found very good data on technological acceptance in all the countries in the sample, but with special acceptance in the United States and European countries such as Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Greece, or Italy.

To complete the analysis of the TAM results, we measured the ‘Intention to use’ these technologies. The social workers exhibited clear intention to use them, in accord with the other parameters measured on the TAM scale. In fact, 79.2 percent would like to use emerging technologies in the future and 78.5 percent would do so to progress in social work.

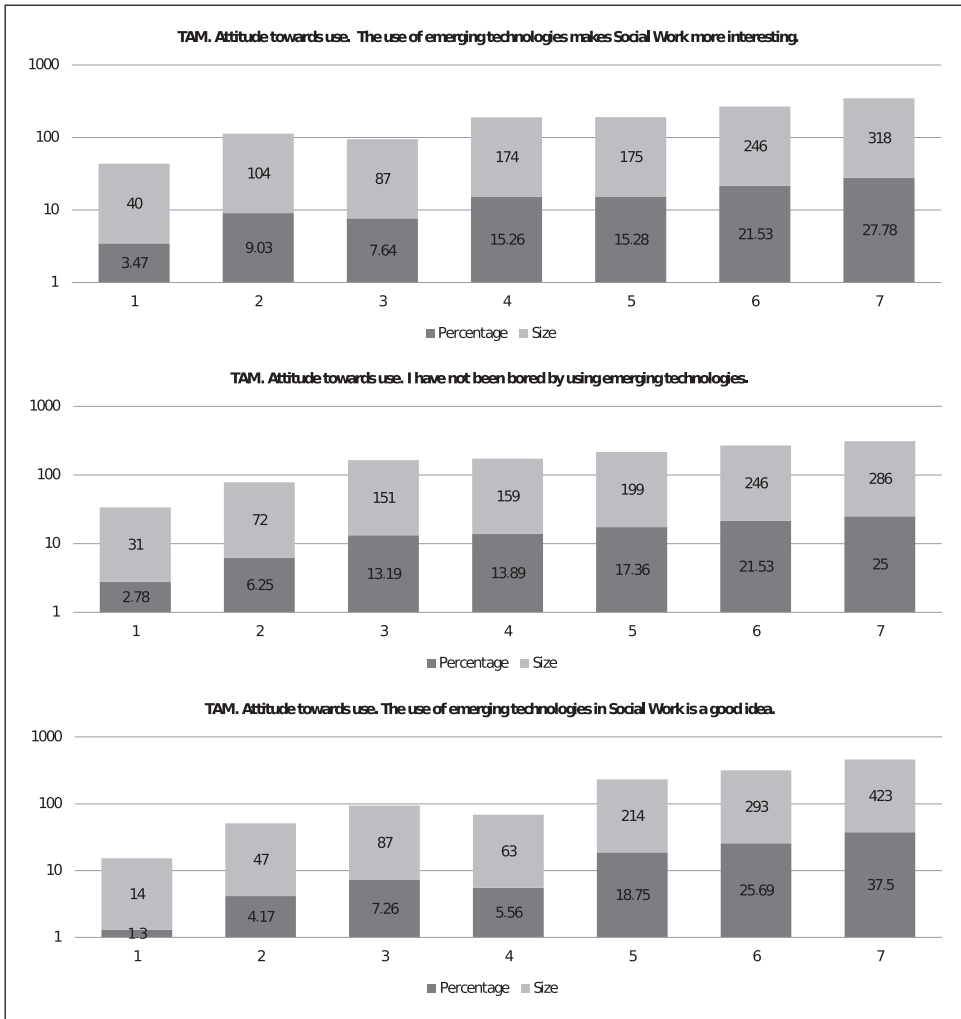


Figure 4. TAM. Attitude towards use.

If we also linked this descriptive data on technological acceptance with a Pearson-type correlation analysis, we see that our hypothesis is confirmed.

The correlations are very conclusive. All the variables of all the dimensions on the questionnaire show significant correlations ($p < .001$), measured with Pearson’s correlation coefficient (for more complete information, see Table 2).

Our study has also made an analysis of coincidence with the indications for professional practice in social work in the use of technological instruments proposed by the NASW (described earlier). To do this, we calculated the means and standard deviation of the six items analysed. These items were scored by the social workers from one to four, with four indicating the highest level of agreement with the statement. The means obtained ranged between 3.82 and 3.56, all of them very close to 4 (maximum value) and the standard deviations were very low (between 0.646 and 0.761). The means values were very close to 4, which tells us that social workers believe they should use technology to inform and mobilize communities in support of policies that will benefit individuals

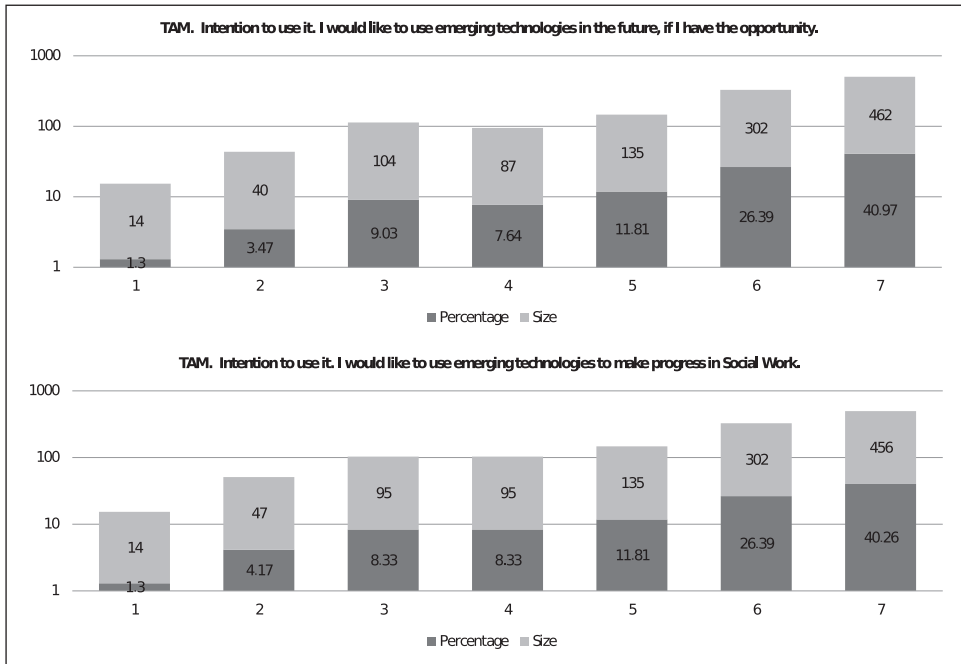


Figure 5. TAM. Intention to use.

and groups and that they should advocate for the adoption and use of relevant technologies that improve the well-being of communities; that they should stay informed about technology to improve the quality of programmes and the rendering of services and that they should strive to become and stay informed about the dynamics of online relationships, the pros and cons of non-face-to-face interactions and the ways in which technology-based social work can be carried out securely and appropriately; that those who conduct, evaluate, disseminate and implement research using technological approaches should do so in a way that ensures ethical credibility and participants’ informed consent; and that, when supervision and consultation are used or provided through technological means, social work supervisors and supervisees should follow the standards applicable to a face-to-face supervisory relationships, and be competent in the technologies used. In this case, we do not find significant differences between the different countries in the sample.

To complete our analysis, social workers were asked about the benefits of using emerging technologies. The advantages with scores above 70 percent (71.4%–94%) were the following: improved access to resources (prior appointments and others), greater access to information, enhanced accessibility of the user’s data and file, better connections and information exchanges between professionals, the facilitation and streamlining of bureaucratic procedures, improved communication with other professions and improved interprofessional communication among social workers. There were scores between 52.6 percent and 69.2 percent for reduced waiting times, much greater research possibilities, the possibility of connecting new technical and diagnostic tools in each case, and for remote consultations between community social services and specialists; allowing professionals to remain in continuous contact, thus improving their training and skills; better and faster communication between different services; remote care; the facilitation of equity in access to services, regardless of geographic location; easier access to education; reduced expenses, sparing professionals and users from the need to travel; greater simplicity in the dissemination of

Table 2. TAM Pearson's correlation coefficient.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
TAM. UT 1	—														
TAM. UT 2	.722**	—													
TAM. UT 3	.794**	.783**	—												
TAM. UT 4	.827**	.773**	.831**	—											
TAM. FU 1	.544**	.626**	.600**	.631**	—										
TAM. FU 2	.429**	.448**	.500**	.543**	.541**	—									
TAM. FU 3	.566**	.579**	.612**	.618**	.700**	.681**	—								
TAM. DI 1	.550**	.617**	.604**	.580**	.909**	.578**	.733**	—							
TAM. DI 2	.583**	.622**	.639**	.661**	.832**	.576**	.716**	.874**	—						
TAM. DI 3	.788**	.690**	.746**	.791**	.601**	.437**	.651**	.631**	.707**	—					
TAM. AC 1	.726**	.663**	.663**	.747**	.607**	.455**	.618**	.629**	.702**	.814**	—				
TAM. AC 2	.584**	.602**	.604**	.673**	.755**	.490**	.630**	.733**	.822**	.681**	.656**	—			
TAM. AC 3	.757**	.756**	.792**	.811**	.677**	.507**	.654**	.699**	.722**	.813**	.767**	.751**	—		
TAM. IN 1	.756**	.730**	.812**	.821**	.679**	.533**	.654**	.686**	.737**	.786**	.747**	.740**	.937**	—	
TAM. IN 2	.772**	.699**	.758**	.795**	.626**	.477**	.613**	.632**	.680**	.836**	.773**	.740**	.904**	.910**	—

TAM: Technology Acceptance Model; UT: Perceived utility; FU: Ease of Use; DI: Perceived enjoyment; AC: Attitude towards use; IN: Intention to use.

**The correlation is significant at .01 (bilateral).

information; and the reduction of CO₂ emissions thanks to reduced travel. The rest of the figures were less than 50 percent. These data are repeated in a very similar way among the different social workers in the countries analysed, with small percentage variations.

Conclusion/discussion

As we can see, social workers, as professionals, exhibit very high levels of Technological Acceptance (according to the TAM scale), in all its dimensions: 'Perceived utility' and 'Perceived ease of use' with respect to emerging technologies in social work, in addition to 'Perceived enjoyment', 'Attitude towards use' and 'Intent to use' these technologies. This places social workers on the cutting edge in terms of their professionalized use of emerging technologies. We see concordance between the statements of the NASW and BASW (2005) when they proposed definitions of possible situations and contexts constituting ethical issues faced by the discipline; and, along the same line, the contributions of Reamer (2015a). Thus, social work can provide responses to many exclusionary elements related to new technologies, and address elements of technological inequality. We are witnessing the normalization of the use of emerging technologies by social workers; as Christenson (2019) states, it is now part of daily work in the discipline. The positive results on the TAM scale reveal that we are dealing with a 'proactive' community of social workers, to borrow a term from Belluomini (2019). Thus, social workers' excellent technological adaptation is evident, as Bryant et al. (2015) asserted, as these workers consider the use of technologies to constitute valuable solutions. Here, we also concur with the statements of McCarty and Clancy (2002), and those of Reamer (2015b). We therefore agree with the contributions of other research that affirm this positive relationship between social work and new technologies, such as De Lucas and D'Antonio (2020), Fuente and Martín (2019), Hidalgo and Lima (2018), Raya (2018), or Baker et al. (2018).

When we have explored the way that social workers can and should use emerging technologies, we have found total concurrence with the postulates of the NASW and the BASW (2005); that is, social workers believe that they should use technology to inform and mobilize communities in support of policies that will benefit individuals and groups; that they should advocate the adoption and use of relevant technologies that improve communities' well-being; strive to stay informed about technology to improve programme quality and the rendering of services; and endeavour to become and remain informed also about the pros and cons of non-face-to-face interactions, and the ways in which technology-based social work can be carried out securely and appropriately; that those who conduct, evaluate, disseminate and implement research using technological approaches should do so in a way that ensures ethical credibility and participants' informed consent; and that, when supervision and consultation are used or provided through technological means, social work supervisors and supervisees should follow the standards applicable to a face-to-face supervisory relationships, and be competent in the technologies used. Although part of the sample does not belong to NASW or BASW, it should be noted that their guidelines are taken up at the international level by IFSW, which in turn influences and spreads these influences to the national and local organizations of the other countries to which the social workers in the sample belong.

In addition, social workers clearly acknowledge the advantages of the use of emerging technologies, highlighting, particularly, improved access to resources (prior appointment and others); greater access to information, better accessibility to the user's data and file, better connections and information exchange between professionals, the facilitation and streamlining of bureaucratic procedures, improved communication with other professions and improved interprofessional communication among social workers. We agree with and underscore this harmony and identification

of advantages for social workers, especially as regards their intervention, like Bryant et al. (2015) expressed. In accord with the contributions of Christenson (2019), we agree that social workers now enjoy immense possibilities.

There is a clear correlation between a high technological acceptance score (TAM) and years of experience as a social worker, that is, the more experience, the higher the technological acceptance. This conclusion is consistent with the study by Mishna et al. (2019). Other factor such as gender or degree status do not provide statistical correlation data. In addition, the subjects aged +60 have the most problems with technological acceptance. What our data do reflect are the importance of experience, that is, social workers with more years of professional practice are the ones with the greatest technological acceptance, regardless of their age. This is in line with the contributions of Mishna's research (Mishna et al., 2019).

We can confirm the attainment of our objective; we have verified social workers' degree of technological acceptance at the international level, and how the link between professional practice and the use of new technological possibilities is forged. Moreover, we have confirmed our initial hypothesis: social workers exhibit a high degree of technological acceptance because they detect major advantages offered by the use of emerging technologies in their professional practice.

This high degree of technological acceptance in social work is bringing the discipline up to date in terms of its possibilities, and preparing its professionals to tackle these new challenges and develop these new capacities. Social work's adaptations to its environment, from the technical and methodological point of view, have been a constant in the development of the discipline itself, ensuring a special sensitivity to social changes and advances, and allowing it, ever since its advent, to proceed in the most up-to-date and professional way possible to address the objects of its intervention and research. The use of these ICTs will, clearly, be a widespread phenomenon in the profession in the near future. These advances and changes, like all such shifts, will not be easy, as the discipline of social work will have to face important challenges and grapple with controversies, especially of an ethical nature, which it will surely overcome through the sensitivity and adaptability that are its hallmarks. All of this relates to contributions already made by Mishna et al. (2014, 2017), Chan and Holosko (2016), López (2014), Hill and Shaw (2011), Del Fresno and López-Peláez (2013), Warburton et al. (2014) or Dellor et al. (2015).

Although in our study we have not obtained relevant data on the discrepancies and problems of technological acceptance in social workers (the data from our study have been very positive in relation to this technological acceptance), we cannot forget the reflections of Watling and Rogers (2012); the contributions of the study of Gillingham (2013), on the difficulties that the use of these technologies can cause to the practical intervention of social workers; Gillingham (2016), on managerialism; or about the perception of ICT in social work in relation to Hill and Shaw (2011).

The main limitations of our study have been the following: At a sample level, we would have liked to have been more representative of all the countries. The improvement of the measurements from a better sample would make them more valid and reliable. The study is of a descriptive and transversal type, which generates some limitations to make any verifiable statement about what social workers do or do not do. It will be interesting for further research to deepen the discrepancies and problems of technological acceptance in social workers.

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