Exploring the Role of Social Media and Knowledge Management Processes in Organizational Learning

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Abstract: Based on theories from sociology and strategic management, this paper develops a conceptual model to understand how Enterprise Social Networking Systems usage will influence knowledge management processes (knowledge creation and knowledge sharing) and organizational learning. It further explores the possible mediating role of knowledge management processes in the path.

Keywords: Enterprise Social Networking Systems, knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, organizational learning

The massive adoption of social media in enterprise has changed the way people communicate, exchange information, solve problems and make decisions. Companies use various social media tools to perform different organizational functions. Enterprise Social Networking Systems (ESNS) are social networking systems implemented inside the boundary of organizations with a major purpose to support social networking within the organization. ESNS is believed to be most relevant to the current research context since ESNS are directly related to knowledge management processes, and social networking systems (in particular) have significant effects on organizational consequences (Fulk & Yuan, 2013).

Enterprise social media usage has positive effects on various work outcomes. Knowledge management processes and workplace learning are among the most important two (Thomas & Akdere, 2014). Knowledge management is defined as a systematic and integrative process of coordinating organization-wide activities of acquiring, creating, storing, sharing, developing, and deploying knowledge to pursue organizational goals (Rastogi, 2000). Traditionally, knowledge management is a formal, top-down organizational process and in some cases, a compulsory organizational policy (Razmerita et al., 2014). Enterprise social media usage, on the other hand, is more informal, bottom-up and voluntary (Annabi & McGann, 2013). Recent studies have dichotomous opinions on the “marriage” between the two knowledge related initiatives, this paper supports the opinion that social media is different from knowledge management, and is a significant enabler of knowledge management processes due to its low cost and interactive nature. Enterprise social media also enhances organizational learning directly and/or indirectly via knowledge management processes. Learning activities under social media context is believed to be an “informal learning” (Marsick & Volpe, 1999) or “new social learning” (Bingahm & Conner, 2010). It encourages knowledge transfer and connects people in a way consistent with how they naturally interact. The learning activities with social media are the new generation of learning where social media is not only used as a tool for communication or marketing purposes but also a means to improve organizational learning (Huang, et al., 2010).

Based on the Knowledge-based view, knowledge management is identified as a critical capability providing organizations with a source of competitive advantage (Sabherwal & Sabherwal, 2007). The ability of continuous learning is one of the organizational advantages that knowledge management can help to obtain. Learning is much more effective if a system (e.g., enterprise social media) is put into place by which knowledge can be captured, shared, and understood. Many knowledge management processes exist in the literature, however, the present research only includes knowledge creation and knowledge sharing since they have been proved to be the most critical knowledge management initiatives under the “social” context (Thomas & Akdere, 2014; Ray, 2014).

Most of the studies in the literature have investigated social media’s influence on the two dependent variables separately, and many of them are qualitative or conceptual in nature. Few efforts were paid to understand the causal relationship between social media, knowledge management and organizational learning. Even few studies have tried to explore specifically the influence of ESNS on organizational level of outcomes. For knowledge management processes, many researchers pointed out that knowledge creation and knowledge sharing are the most critical factors under the “social” context, however, few of them have tested the mediating role of knowledge management between organizational social media usage and organizational performance. This research helps to address the above gaps in the literature in a conceptual way.

Multiple theories were used to support the hypotheses development process. They are the theory of Information Public Good, Social Capital, Social Cognitive and Knowledge-based View. Information Public
Goods Theory (Fulk, et al., 2004) focuses on the motivational aspect of knowledge management processes, e.g., why people need to contribute and share knowledge within a collective; Social Capital Theory is usually used to explain the importance of social networks in influencing knowledge processes (Parise, 2009); Social Cognitive Theory is the individual level of the learning theory that has been extended to understand organizational learning; and Knowledge-based view considers knowledge as the most strategically significant resource of a firm (Kogut & Zander, 1992). Based on the above theories, we developed the current theoretical model with research hypotheses (Figure 1.).

![Figure 1. Research model and hypotheses](image-url)

References:


