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Collaborative competencies in professional social networking: Are students short changed by curriculum in business education?

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ABSTRACT

Social networks have earned their indisputable place as a collaborative learning tool in education. In this paper, we address the gap in literature on developing a set of competencies to allow graduates to make the most of collaborative technologies for business and professional activity as well as career management. Based on a survey of over 600 business school graduates from AMBA accredited UK universities, we are able to identify the level of awareness and degree of application of professional usage of social networks amongst students. Our results show that work experience and age of the business students play a significant role in their usage of social networks for professional purposes, knowledge and career management. The data shows that younger students are more social networking savvy when it comes to identifying business opportunities, while older graduates are less confident. This is important as traditionally graduate students are individuals in their mid careers and the skill gap between generation Y and the experienced graduates need to be bridged by adequate curriculum changes.

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1. Introduction

The last decade has seen online social networking take the centre stage amongst innovative collaboration tools. Higher Education was no exception. Academic literature provides a rich account of successful academic applications of social technologies. Earlier research showed the potential of social networking throughout the entire student lifecycle from pre-application to university to life-long learning stages (Benson, Morgan, & Tennakoon, 2011) and provides examples of using social networks as means for collaborative knowledge sharing. Knowledge management literature stresses the importance of flexibility and collaborative competencies in knowledge sharing for business success (Lytras & Ordóñez de Pablos, 2008). A number of studies provide an ample account of social technologies integrations into learning and teaching (for review see e.g. Benson & Morgan, 2014), the area which has been transformed through the new technology medium. This transformation corresponds to the emergence of collaborative learning which is highly enriched by the potential offered by social technologies (Lytras & Ordóñez de Pablos, 2011).

Users tend to join social networks as they perceive value in belonging to a network and building connections through it. For

example (Yang & Lin, 2014), suggest that the value of belonging to a network is threefold. According to the authors, joining Facebook offers its users social, hedonistic and epistemic values, and users with different aims of belonging to a network draw different benefits from it. Furthermore, knowledge sharing opportunities through social networks have been explored by Chow and Chan (2008). It was found that employees receive satisfaction from content and knowledge sharing in trusted environment in professional settings. This is closely linked with the concept of social capital built through the online social networks. Social capital theory supports the notion of ties between network entities bringing value to those connected. This is even more true in the current unstable economic climate with employment fluctuations and highly competitive job market for graduates (Gu, Zhang, & Liu, 2014).

The increased popularity of social networking is largely due to the proliferation of smart/mobile devices and the intuitive nature of social technologies (Croitoru, Crooks, Radzikowski, & Stefanidis, 2013; Salehan & Negahban, 2013). An area which, until now, received limited coverage in the academic literature refers to the move from the intuitive use to knowledge led ability to leverage social networking sites for business and professional purposes. Earlier publications addressed the intuitive use of social networks and social capital accumulated through networking by graduates (Benson, Morgan, & Filippaios, 2010). The researchers showed that international students were actively using networking with other

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social users to form useful connections during job search and career management, while UK students, especially undergraduates, used social networks largely for personal and leisure use. Other publications call for more research on the professional competencies necessary to operate in social networking environment (Shah, 2010).

The accounts of universities providing comprehensive courses addressing skills for professional use of online social networks are scarce, even more so in the context of business and management programmes. Exploring the factors that influence business students' use of social networks for personal and business purposes is the key research question of this paper. Using a sample of more than 600 graduates from AMBA accredited schools we explore the role of demographic factors, years of work experience, digital footprint awareness and concerns over privacy and addiction on the use of social networks. More precisely, this paper provides an insight into the reasons why business students join social networks and what value they see in signing up to yet another social application.

The paper is structured as follows. It opens up with the review of literature on the successful application of social technologies, including knowledge sharing, and their impact which may hinder adoption of social media in academia. We then describe the method for empirical data collection and analysis in Section 4. Section 5 outlines the findings on the awareness of professional use of social networks, which is followed by implications for practice. The paper concludes with possible limitations of the study and open research questions.

2. Implications of social media in personal and professional settings for graduates

Reports of social network adoption in learning and teaching are plentiful (Pimmer, Linxen, & Grohien, 2012) and knowledge management literature emphasises the need for development of collaborative competencies in graduates, especially in the business education area. The use of social networks as collaborative platforms in education has far reaching implications. As discussed in Benson et al. (2011), social networks represent a knowledge convergence platform for students at different stages of Higher Education and have the potential to enable collaboration and integration into life-long learning. Development of collaborative competencies, knowledge construction and sharing skills are important for successful graduate employment. Recent studies on human resource competencies show that organisational requirements for the exploitation of human resource capital require collative competencies for knowledge dissemination and sharing in the work place to promote organisational performance (Lytras & Ordóñez de Pablos, 2008).

Along the same line of argument, studies have shown that the creation and strength of social ties can lead to knowledge contribution behaviour (Chai & Kim, 2012) and social networks have now become the main means for communicating and keeping in touch with others to share and create knowledge (Johnston, Chen, & Hauman, 2013). It has also recently been shown that this knowledge creation and sharing process is enhanced by the amount of use of social networks, with people that make extensive use of social networks to show a higher willingness to share information (Chang & Hsiao, 2014).

The main aim of this paper is to explore the factors that influence the use of social networks from graduates in personal and professional settings. We would expect certain demographic characteristics to significantly influence use, with age and gender being two factors explored in this paper. The literature is quite scarce with regard to the influence gender has on the use of social networks. Age acts as a good indicator of information technology

literacy and usually younger people are more inclined to use social networks for personal and professional purposes (Haight, Quan-Haase, & Corbett, 2014). The study also has shown that generally women tend to join social networks in order to participate in collaborative knowledge creation. With the above arguments in mind we put forward our two first hypotheses:

H1. Age will have a negative effect on the use of social networks for personal and professional purposes.

H2. Women will have a stronger tendency to use social networks for personal and professional purposes.

The second major factor determining use of social networks for personal and primarily for professional purposes is the years of work experience of users. Years of work experience tend to suggest a maturity in terms of career development and an awareness of the factors that lead to success in the business place. Along the same line of argument, people with established careers will rely less on social networks to find a job. Contrary to this, people with established careers and less use of social networks might be less prepared for an emerging virtual professional culture (Agarwal & Mital, 2009). Understanding this virtual professional culture might be crucial for the first few years of developing your career path. This leads to the development of our third hypothesis:

H3. Years of work experience will have a negative effect on the use of social networks for personal and professional purposes.

Following on from years of work experience, time availability is another crucial factor that influence the use of social networks for personal and professional purposes. Usually people in senior positions in organisations with demanding jobs and possible issues of overexposure of information will tend to use social networks less. Studies (Weng Marc, Ding Hooi, Puspitasari, Prasetya, & Gunadi, 2012) have shown that the issues of overexposure pose a strong constrain to the use. This leads to the development of our fourth hypothesis:

H4. Time availability (lack of) will have a negative effect on the use of SNS for personal and professional purposes.

Clearly, the positive impact of Information and Communication Technology, including social media, outweighs its negative aspects. This explains why the literature on adverse effects of technology is relatively lean. According to recent studies, people feel pressured into checking their messages even when off work; ubiquitous technology creates a disruptive effect on both social life and productivity (Christakis & Fowler, 2013). Research shows that social networks, Skype and instant messaging lead to stress induced by multitasking at work, which in turn leads to monetary losses for organisations (Baumer, 2013).

Factors such as perceived risk of social networks and the overall internet risk perception will negatively influence both the use as well as the enjoyment users draw from engagement (Chen, 2013). General concerns over privacy abuse will also contribute to users' perceived risk and therefore will negatively influence use. Finally, factors such as the social networks' structural assurance captured by regulations and code of conduct lead to knowledge contribution behaviour (Chai & Kim, 2012).

Addiction has been linked to overuse of social media and is a cause of many other psychological implications including loss of confidence, decline of face to face communication skills and break up of personal relationships (Salehan & Negahban, 2013). Users easily develop trust into social networks and their providers, this

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