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The effects of network sharing on knowledge-sharing activities and job performance in enterprise social media environments

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of the tertius iungens orientation on knowledge-sharing activities and individual job performance within enterprise social media environments. The empirical analysis reveals that knowledge self-efficacy, social interaction ties, and the norm of reciprocity positively influence the tertius iungens orientation and knowledge-sharing activities in social media, while enjoyment of helping does not have a significant influence. In addition, the tertius iungens orientation has a significant impact on knowledge-sharing activities in social media, which in turn influences individual job performance. Based on the results of this analysis, this study discusses the research findings and proposes theoretical and practical implications of the study as well as the research's limitations.

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1. Introduction

Social media environments offer unique features, including openness, two-way communication, and open-ended feedback. These characteristics have made it possible for large numbers of people to freely and easily share their thoughts, opinions, experiences, perspectives, information, and knowledge through social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Given the importance of mobilizing knowledge resources through active and close relationships with coworkers (Borgatti & Cross, 2003), social media, by nature, can be useful in facilitating knowledge-sharing activities within organizations. Social media platforms are increasingly implemented in work organizations as tools for communication among employees (Leonardi, Huysman, & Steinfield, 2013). Leonardi et al. (2013, p. 2) call social media in work environments "enterprise social media," which they define as "web-based platforms that allow workers to (1) communicate messages with specific co-workers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization; (2) explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular coworkers as

communication partners; (3) post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and (4) view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organization at any time of their choosing." With the help of web technology, social media can be combined with various media tools, such as video, audio, or photos, and various communication tools, such as chat applications, audio/video conferencing programs, or feedback systems. Through social media, employees can easily share not only their explicit knowledge through written communication, but also their tacit knowledge, which may be difficult to express in written form. Social media can make shared knowledge richer and more abundant, which in turn promotes knowledge-sharing activities.

People who actively use social media gain knowledge and information that they can use to resolve problems they may encounter with coworkers or various others. Thus, in a social media context tertius iungens activity, which involves the introduction of unconnected individuals, can play an important role in information exchange and knowledge sharing. Hess (2013) has proposed that the role of the tertius iungens orientation in the news media involves "bridging and linking" to control the types of information shared between individuals, to connect people across cultural, social, and economic spaces, and to link people with others in positions of power. In the context of enterprises' social media efforts, tertius iungens activities are expected to lead to the development of

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strongly connected network structures (Obstfeld, 2005), in which knowledge and information are smoothly transmitted by introducing people who are not yet connected to one another. This can make knowledge sharing more efficient and effective.

This study examines how individuals' tertius iungens orientations affect knowledge-sharing activities and individual job performance. We propose a conceptual framework involving three-step cause and effect relationships, moving from the formation of tertius iungens to the activation of knowledge-sharing behavior, and then to the creation of job performance in social media environments. In the first step, we posit that individual and social factors affect the level of tertius iungens orientation through social media. Our hypotheses concerning this step are based on social cognitive theory and social capital theory. In the second step, knowledge-sharing activity is developed through the tertius iungens orientation and its antecedents. In the final step, the effect of the tertius iungens orientation on individual job performance is revealed through knowledge-sharing activities.

Our study makes significant theoretical contributions by revealing the important role of the tertius iungens orientation in the relationship between individual and social factors, knowledge-sharing activities, and job performance, and presents practical implications for companies' in-house social media strategies that make it possible to enhance individual job performance.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Social media

The emergence of Web 2.0 has paved the way for the appearance of new forms of media, now commonly known as social media. An increase in smartphone users has also promoted the use of social media, and led people to naturally incorporate social media into their daily lives. The term "social media" refers to Internet-based applications that are used by people to share their opinions, thoughts, experiences, and perspectives (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Rather than simply searching for and passively consuming information, social media users exhibit a tendency to create information in a cooperative manner, and to evaluate and share information (Lerman, 2007).

Social media is characterized by two-way communication. As a result, social media platforms have become entrenched as tools that are used to actualize participation, sharing, and openness online. The use of social media makes it possible to easily connect and bring people together through content. It not only helps to accumulate knowledge capital by enlarging human networks, but also builds social capital through the participation of people who share similar interests in related efforts. Previous studies on social media are summarized in Table 1.

Previous research on enterprises' social media environments has proceeded in two primary ways (Leonardi et al., 2013). One commonly studied research stream has focused on organizational communication with external parties, such as customers, vendors, and the public at large. Most companies using social media to communicate with external parties employ multipronged strategies that cross various social media platforms, e.g., Facebook and Twitter (Piskorski, 2011). Companies use social media to effectively manage relationships with partners and clients, and improve their corporate image (Wyld, 2008). Meanwhile, the other research stream, which is less commonly studied, explores how organizations employ social media for internal communications and social interaction within their enterprises (Leonardi et al., 2013). From an internal standpoint, companies have used social media as an effective tool with which to pursue ends such as the obtainment, exchange, and sharing of knowledge. For example, the British

Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has established "talk.gateway," a social media site that its employees can use to upload questions, search for answers, and form relationships. This site, where employees can ask and answer questions related not only to daily life issues but also to organizational job duties, has grown to become one of the largest such communities, with 23,000 of the approximately 26,000 BBC employees as members (Cook, 2008). Vuori and Väisänen (2009) have conducted a study on how the use of social media within enterprises can contribute to the gathering and sharing of information and knowledge. Their study revealed that social media played a more important role in sharing knowledge and information than in gathering it. In addition, in a study of 175 employees, Lee and Kwahk (2010) empirically proved that the use of social media improved participation in the knowledge sharing and decision-making processes, and consequently improved job performance. Table 2 shows the differences between public and enterprise social media.

2.2. Social cognitive theory and social capital theory

Social cognitive theory has been used to help understand individual motivations and behaviors in various situations. Bandura (1986) asserts that individual behaviors are the result of interactions between the social environment and individual cognition. In other words, when learning and maintaining a specific behavioral pattern, people are influenced by individual and intrinsic cognitive factors, as well as by surrounding relational and environmental social factors.

As a result of social cognitive theory's emphasis on individual and intrinsic factors, many previous studies have paid attention to the notion of self-efficacy (Chen & Hung, 2010; Compeau & Higgins, 1995; Lin & Huang, 2008, 2010). Self-efficacy is defined as "the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute a course of action that is required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1977). In other words, self-efficacy is a person's belief in his or her ability to succeed in a particular situation, rather than a person's possession of specific skills. When members of an organization exhibit a high level of self-efficacy vis-à-vis knowledge, and have strong cognitive belief in their use of knowledge, their efforts to share knowledge are also heightened, and they exhibit a tendency to achieve individual outcomes by learning shared knowledge (Lin & Huang, 2008, 2010). Zimmermann and Ravishankar (2014) argue that knowledge transfer mechanisms can be better understood by considering knowledge senders' efficacy and outcome expectations, which are two potentially crucial motivational drivers of knowledge transfer. To this end, self-efficacy plays an important role in the achievement of self-set goals and, consequently, in the improvement of individual and organizational performance (Quigley, Tesluk, Locke, & Bartol, 2007).

From the perspective of social cognitive theory, the enjoyment of helping, more commonly referred to as altruism, is another important individual and intrinsic motivation for human behavior. According to Kollock (1999), people tend to enjoy helping others, and perceive that it is fair to help others face difficult problems through the contribution of knowledge. Furthermore, those who share knowledge within online environments, such as social media environments, have more opportunities to help others than those in offline environments (Wasko & Faraj, 2000). Cheung, Lee, and Lee (2013) theorize that community members make judgments about their knowledge-sharing behaviors by considering their normative expectations of knowledge sharing and enjoyment of helping other members. They have found that when community members are able to help other members in the ways that they expect, they feel satisfied, and this satisfaction further affects their intention to continue sharing knowledge in an online community