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The effect of apathetic motivation on employees' intentions to use social media for businesses

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ABSTRACT

Businesses benefit when employees use social-media technologies to connect with stakeholders, but extant evidence indicates mixed results in getting employees to do it. We propose part of the explanation stems from apathetic motivation among employees; we investigate whether apathetic motivation appears at the other end of the spectrum of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, or whether it varies independent of other motivations. We find evidence that apathetic, intrinsic, and extrinsic motivations appear as distinct motivations and can all coexist at times—that some individuals who report high intrinsic or extrinsic motivations also report high apathetic motivation, and there are significant interaction terms. Furthermore, the relationship between intention to use and actual usage appears to be amplified in the case of individuals in marketing/sales versus diminished in the case of individuals in other departments, consistent with the idea that the customer-facing nature of some jobs impacts intention to use social media technologies.

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1. Introduction

Motivation has been broadly characterized as one of the more powerful predictors of human behavior—a key predictor of performance for practitioners and a crucial element in creating theories of behavior for theorists (Steers, Mowday, & Shapiro, 2004). Thus, it is not surprising that motivation appears in a variety of discipline journals (e.g., Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992; Fitzmaurice, 2005; Levin & Hansen, 2008; Miao & Evans, 2007), nor that business researchers and managers have great interest in understanding individuals' motivation to use social media and mobile technologies on behalf of businesses (e.g., Leftheriotis & Giannakos, 2014; Levin, Hansen, & Laverie, 2012).

While most research studies and textbooks continue to treat motivation as a bi-dimensional construct (comprised of extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation), a few studies have suggested a third form of motivation—apathetic motivation (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 2002; Levin et al., 2012; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). Apathetic motivation is defined as a lack of interest or enthusiasm in a particular task or topic. Reasons for its presence could include lack of confidence in the ability to perform a task and/or lack of belief in materialization of the desired outcomes. We find it fascinating that there appears to be a prevailing view in research that a “lack of interest” is treated as equivalent to a “lack of

motivation” in the conceptual discussion, scaling, and analysis in most research studies that mention it. Verily, we disagree with that treatment. We argue that apathetic motivation is not simply the absence of other motivations. Rather, we posit that the lack of interest or enthusiasm is independent of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Indeed, we propose that what many have considered to be a single phenomenon (compounding motivations and amotivations) is actually multiple distinct phenomena, as specified in the next paragraph.

Consequently, the purpose of this research is to outline and investigate the hypothesis that apathetic motivation can exist simultaneously with extrinsic motivation and/or intrinsic motivation—with the goal of improving our understanding of why some intrinsically or extrinsically motivated workers do not act on those motivations in the important context of using social media for businesses. Adopting that goal, the contribution of this article to the existing motivation literature is the first empirical investigation containing joint examination of (1) apathetic motivation's direct contribution to behavioral intention *independent* of extrinsic and intrinsic motivations' contributions; (2) potential *interactions* of apathetic motivation with (a) extrinsic or intrinsic motivation on intention to use or (b) intention to use on actual usage or outcomes; and (3) *interactions* between intention to use social media technologies based on the combined motivations and employee job roles (i.e., moderated moderation).

In the next sections, we provide reasoning for our assertions and subsequent examination of hypotheses through empirical examination. The first section reviews extant research and provides hypotheses. The

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second section describes an empirical study. The third section presents analysis and interpretation. The fourth and final section outlines an agenda for future research.

2. Conceptual background

In this section we outline the results of extant research on relationships between motivation types, intention to use, usage, and outcomes of usage in combination with descriptions of our proposed logic, resulting in the theorized model illustrated in Fig. 1.

2.1. Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation refers to “performing an activity as a means to an end; that is, to achieve a potentially desired outcome or reward.” Outcomes and rewards can be tangible, such as a monetary bonus, certificate, prize, award, etc., or intangible such as a skill that is perceived to be useful or needed in the future or that improves one’s social standing, etc. (Davis et al., 1992; Porter & Lawler, 1968; Vallerand et al., 1992). Drawing on expectancy theory, as the individual’s degree of extrinsic motivation increases, the individual’s degree of value derived from the performance of the behavior should increase as mediated by the intention to perform the behavior and the actual performance of the behavior (Vroom, 1964). In short, extrinsic motivation should increase behavioral intention. Extant empirical business research finds a positive relationship between extrinsic motivation and behavioral intention (see, e.g., Hansen & Levin, 2010; Levin et al., 2012). Thus, we expect individuals with higher degrees of extrinsic motivation to be more likely to use social media technology on behalf of the business.

H1. Extrinsic motivation has a significant positive effect on a person’s intention to use social media technologies on behalf of the business.

2.2. Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to “performing an activity for the inherent enjoyment, pleasure, or satisfaction derived from the activity” (Davis et al., 1992; Levin et al., 2012; Vallerand et al., 1992). An individual with higher degrees of intrinsic motivation develops skills and

knowledge through his or her personal volition, and such individuals enjoy performing activities without the presence of any extrinsic rewards or punishments (Hansen & Levin, 2010). Drawing on expectancy theory, as the individual’s degree of intrinsic motivation increases, the individual’s degree of value derived from the performance of the behavior should increase as mediated by the intention to perform the behavior and the actual performance of the behavior (Vroom, 1964). Consistent with self-determination theory (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989), intrinsic motivation is also expected to correspond positively with extrinsic motivation; this theorized relationship has been supported in prior research (Levin et al., 2012). In summary, we posit that employees who simply enjoy performing this task are more likely to intend to use the social media technology for the business.

H2. Intrinsic motivation has a significant positive effect on a person’s intention to use social media technology on behalf of the business.

2.3. Apathetic motivation

A small but growing stream of research is arguing for the role of apathetic motivation as a predictor of actual behavior (e.g., Baker, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 2002; Levin et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Vallerand et al., 1992, 1997). Consistent with past research and as stated in the introduction, we define apathetic motivation as a lack of interest or enthusiasm for performing a specific task or activity. A lack of interest or enthusiasm, as a negative valence, should work against a positive intention to use the technology on behalf of the business. Thus,

H3. Apathetic motivation has a significant negative effect on a person’s intention to use social media on behalf of the business.

However, in contrast to the extant literature, we argue that a lack of interest or enthusiasm for performing does not in itself *necessitate* a lack of extrinsic or intrinsic motivation. Rather, reasons for the apathetic motivation could include, among other reasons, a lack of confidence, fear, or disbelief in either ability to perform the tasks (e.g., incompetence, lack of necessary resources) or materialization of the desired outcomes (e.g., uncontrollability of results, distrust of management to follow through on promises).

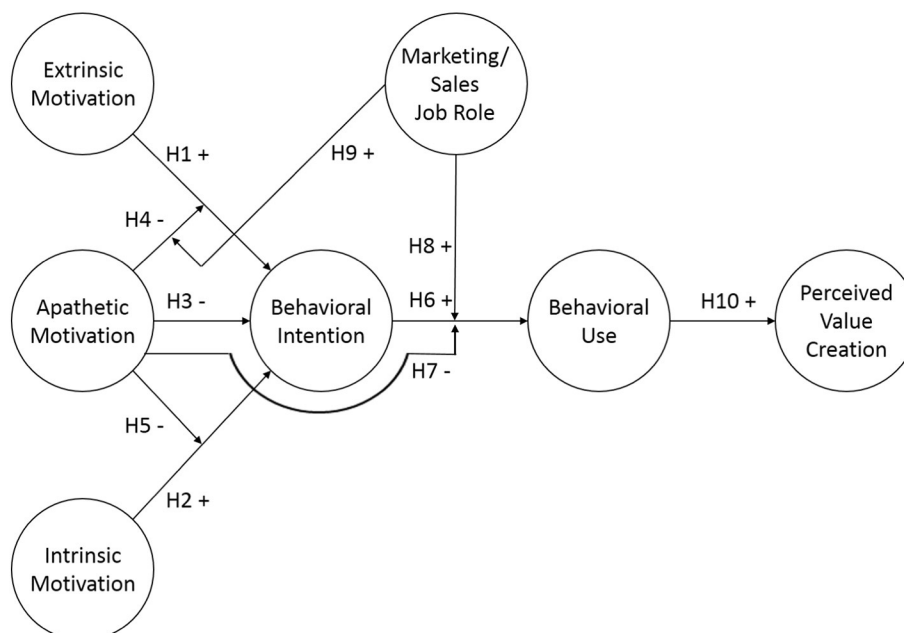


Fig. 1. Theorized model.

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