



Reading behavior on intra-organizational blogging systems: A group-level analysis through the lens of social capital theory

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ABSTRACT

Aiming to explore the factors that potentially determine the continued reading behavior of users on intra-organizational blogging systems, this paper proposes a group-level model that consists of constructs regarding structural, relational, and cognitive social capital. The model is empirically tested with system record data collected from a large telecommunications company. Testing results illustrate that social capital factors have significant impacts on continued reading behavior but that part of their influence is subject to the moderation effects of workgroup characteristics. The findings of this study contribute to the literature on intra-organizational social networking and contain helpful managerial implications for related practice.

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1. Introduction

Social network applications, such as blogs, wikis, and photo and video sharing communities, have enjoyed great popularity in recent years. New applications and services that facilitate collective action and social interaction online through the rich exchange of multimedia information and the evolution of aggregate knowledge are considered a force that is shaping the future of the Internet, with potential impacts on business environments, societies, and the everyday lives of people around the world [1]. Empirical research also reveals that social networking applications may have considerable impacts on the organizational efficiency and business performance of contemporary companies [2].

Social networking tools have also been introduced into corporate contexts [3], creating new intra-organizational information system platforms that are sometimes described as “Enterprise 2.0” [4]. Social network applications, typically corporate internal blogging systems, have been established in companies such as Microsoft [5], IBM [6], HP, Dell and Amazon [7]. Corporate internal blogging systems and other internal enterprise social media platforms have also aroused increasing interest in the academic

research arena [8–10]. Research efforts have addressed issues regarding the behaviors of employees on the new platforms, especially the adoption and use of intra-organizational blogging systems [5,11–14].

The ever increasing population of blog readers presents a promising and important research field [15]. Regarding an intra-organizational blogosphere, understanding users’ reading behavior is crucial to promote posting [16] because blog readers play an indispensable role in building an active blog community [9]. As a social networking platform, a blogosphere would lose its sociality and could be unsustainable without the active participation of readers. In other words, a blogosphere is a social practice that has a dual structure in which the blogs create the audience and the audience enables the blogs, as has been observed in previous studies [17]. Such interactions between reading and writing also distinguish intra-organizational blogging systems from traditional communication tools, such e-mail or instant messaging and are unique characteristics of “Enterprise 2.0”. The existing literature has largely focused on the writing behavior of users on blogging platforms, whereas relatively scarce work has examined blog reading [18]. Generally, writing and reading are two essential aspects of user participation on blogging platforms, comparable to “producing and consuming” in social-economic systems [11,18]. In this sense, research issues regarding blog reading are at least as worthy of investigation as those regarding blog writing.

Furthermore, a company also needs to understand the reading behavior of its employees to facilitate effective knowledge sharing

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[16]. With active interactions between readers and writers, an enterprise blogosphere can effectively support the exchange of ideas and therefore provide a venue for improved transfer, absorption and reproduction of knowledge. Such effects of an intra-organizational blogosphere are especially important when readers and writers belong to different units in the formal organizational structure of a company because organizations with more effective knowledge transfer capabilities between units are typically more productive and innovative [19].

Inspired by such insights, this paper, which takes the perspective of social capital, aims to explore the question of why employees from one organizational unit would continue to read the blogs by employees from other units on an intra-organizational blogosphere. Here, we focus our research on the group-level analysis due to its increasing practical and academic importance. In contemporary organizations, individuals are first nested in workgroups, which in turn form larger units [20]. Groups or teams have become one of the most common types of organizational design [21]. As fundamental organizational building blocks, small groups or teams are deemed by practitioners and academics as increasingly important factors for achieving organizational success [22]. Because blogging is a new form of social activity [17], we base our research on Social Capital Theory to develop a conceptual model that captures the most important features of blog usage and reveal the social factors that potentially drive readers to continue reading in the blogosphere.

Using system record data collected from a large telecommunications company, we empirically test the proposed model. The results illustrate that the model effectively explains the continued reading behavior at the group level. We believe that the findings of this research will contribute to the emerging literature on intra-organizational social networking and provide insights that are helpful to the practice of Enterprise 2.0.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. We first present a review of the existing literature related to blog reading and Social Capital Theory. Second, we discuss the theoretical foundation and propose our research model and related hypotheses. Third, we describe the research method for empirically testing the proposed model and present the results. Fourth, we discuss the statistical analyses and results. Finally, we conclude the paper by summarizing the contributions, managerial implications, and limitations of our research.

2. Related literature

2.1. Reading behavior in blogospheres

It has generally been recognized that blog reading is the key factor in the economics of attention in an intra-organizational blogosphere, playing an important role in maintaining a healthy internal corporate blogging community [9]. Therefore, in the past several years, participants' blog reading behavior has gradually aroused interest in the IS field.

Some research efforts have attempted to explore the motivations and consequences of blog reading. One typical study in this stream postulates four dimensions of reading motives: affective exchange, information search, entertainment, and bandwagon effect [23]. Furthermore, it has been argued that these motives would impact the users' behavior in three major areas: opinion acceptance, interaction intentions and word-of-mouth (WOM) intentions [23]. This stream also includes several studies that extend traditional user adoption models, such as TRA and TTF, to explain the intra-organizational blogging participation of employees that may include reading behavior (e.g., [24]).

Other scholars have examined blog reading from a "pattern analysis" perspective that aims at capturing the dynamical,

structural or network characteristics of employee blog readership in the context of the enterprise blogosphere using mathematical models. Singh et al. [14] develop a dynamic mathematical model. Their study finds that there exists a type of variety-seeking behavior among employees in reading blogs that determines the tendency of an individual reader to switch between a set of topics. They also investigate how the textual characteristics of blogs affect readers' attraction and retention. Huang et al. [11] propose a dynamic structural framework that uses the hidden Markov model (HMM). They contend that, in the context of the enterprise blogosphere, there is strong competition among employees in attracting readership and that a significant spillover effect is detected on the readership of work posts from the creation of leisure posts. The "regular reading" relationships in intra-organizational blogospheres are also examined from a social network perspective, and a decision tree model based on these relationships is proposed to predict regular reading behavior [25].

Moreover, the macro features and results of blog reading behavior also receive some attention. One study of users' attitudes and usage patterns on intra-organizational blogging systems discusses the issues of "attention allocation" for blog reading and "feedback mechanisms" to facilitate reciprocal attention [9]. Another study sheds light on the "reading practices" of bloggers; it discusses the question of whether blog reading is considered "a habit" and the problems of "information overload" and "synchronicity" [15]. Baumer et al. [18] further investigate readers' contributions to blogs by considering factors such as political ideology, political participation and reading habits.

Various research methods have been employed in related works. For instance, social network analysis techniques are adopted in a study based on data collected from Doblog, a Japanese weblog hosting service [25]. Other relevant methods include questionnaire surveys [23,24,26], qualitative and ethnographic investigations [15], archival analysis based on blog server log files and interviews [9], and mathematical modeling based on longitudinal datasets from intra-organizational blogging systems [16].

Generally, research on blog reading behavior is still rare in the existing literature compared to research on blog writing behavior, especially in the intra-organizational context. One possible reason for this phenomenon is that "blog reading, unlike publishing on blogs or commenting on blogs, is usually invisible to external observers" [16]. However, due to the reading behavior data recorded by the intra-organizational blogging system, we can now further investigate this important usage behavior, providing some new insight in this research arena. Moreover, existing studies are more concerned with individual-level analysis, whereas far fewer works on group-level research are currently available.

There is another research gap because most existing studies either are description oriented or focused on analytical techniques, meaning that a theoretical framework for understanding why people engage in this type of regular reading behavior remains rare. It is both academically and practically important to find the reasons for conducting usage behavior and to theoretically explain the underlying mechanism. Our research attempts to fill this gap by proposing a model based on social capital theory and empirically validating the explanatory power.

2.2. Social capital theory

Blogging is a social activity and a collaborative process of co-creation in which both bloggers and readers engage [18]. The characteristic of sociality in blogospheres has been widely recognized and discussed by scholars, and numerous studies have examined weblogs and in particular their social aspects [25]. To understand the sociality of blogging systems, researchers often consider them to be a typical form of "social computing" [27], and

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