



Research Report

Introducing social media for knowledge management: Determinants of employees' intentions to adopt new tools

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ABSTRACT

Although an increasing number of organizations implement social media as means to enhance internal knowledge exchange, employees are in many cases not motivated to make use of new technologies. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify antecedents of employees' intentions to adopt social media for knowledge exchange. Measured factors were derived from expectancy theory and technology acceptance model. To identify factors influencing the willingness to seek and contribute knowledge using social media, in this study $N = 315$ employees within one organization were surveyed. The results clearly support the predictions: the interplay between the importance and deficits concerning knowledge exchange, perceived usefulness of social media for knowledge exchange, and experience in social media use jointly affected the intention to apply social media for knowledge exchange after their implementation.

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1. Introduction

Knowledge management is one of the most important strategic challenges on the route to enduring organizational success and competitiveness, in particular given the steadily increasing frequency with which employees change jobs and companies. In the last years a growing number of organizations have implemented social media such as blogs, wikis, internal networks, and other tools to facilitate knowledge exchange between employees (Bughin & Chui, 2013; Pfisterer, Streim, & Hampe, 2013). In most cases these social media tools are adjusted to the organization's context and additionally enriched by experiences with existing intra-organizational tools (Back, Gronau, & Tochtermann, 2008). Research has shown that social media have the potential to contribute to knowledge exchange also in the organizational context (Grace, 2009; Moskaliuk & Kimmerle, 2009). But social media tools in knowledge exchange do by no means sell themselves. The biggest hurdle to be overcome is to convince employees to actually use the new technology. In many cases people are not motivated to or even resist using new technologies (Matschke, Moskaliuk, Bokhorst, Schümmer, & Cress, 2014; Pirkkalainen & Pawlowski, 2014; Preece & Shneiderman, 2009). Therefore, it is essential to

understand the determinants of the (willingness to) use social media for knowledge exchange in the organizational context. Thus, the current study set out to identify antecedents of employees' intentions to exchange knowledge in the pre-implementation phase by taking a motivational approach.

2. The building blocks of the intention to use social media

Valence-Instrumentality-Expectancy (VIE) theory (Vroom, 1964) has successfully been applied to identify the motivational factors contributing to the successful implementation of new technology (Hertel, Niedner, & Herrmann, 2003; Li, 2011; Snead & Harrell, 1994). VIE theory states that individuals will be encouraged to perform a certain behavior if they (a) conceive a potential outcome as valent (*valence*), (b) foresee the attainment of a particular outcome if the expected performance is shown (*instrumentality*), and (c) expect that their own effort will result in performance (*expectancy*). In the context of social media use, individuals should be motivated (i.e., intend) to exchange knowledge when (a) they regard knowledge exchange as important for their job (*valence*), (b) they believe that using social media contributes to efficient knowledge exchange (*instrumentality*), and (c) they feel confident in their capability to make use of social media for knowledge exchange (*expectancy*).

A lot of studies provided evidence that valence, instrumentality, and expectancy play a significant role both independently and in interaction with each other when predicting intentions, effort,

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and performance (e.g., Ambrose & Kulik, 1999; Sneed & Harrell, 1994; Stahl & Harrell, 1981). Whereas VIE theory explicitly postulates a multiplicative combination of valence, instrumentality, and expectancy, a meta-analysis by Van Eerde and Thierry (1996) confirmed that multiplicative models do not yield higher effect sizes than analyses of the specific components. Based on these findings, the current research assumed that valence, instrumentality, and expectancy assert independent impacts on the intention to use a social media platform after its introduction in an organization. In what follows, we will first discuss the impact of two valence aspects, then the influence of instrumentality, and finally the role of expectancy.

2.1. Valence: importance of knowledge exchange and deficits in knowledge exchange

There is clear evidence for the role of valence in the context of social technology use (e.g., Hertel et al., 2003; Li, 2011). Hertel et al. (2003) have for instance investigated the motivation of software developers to contribute to open source projects. The authors found the valence component – defined as the subjective evaluation of the team goals – to be predictive for motivational criteria such as time investment and willingness to contribute in the future. In other words, the software developers were willing to spend more time with their project the higher they valued its goals.

The valence of knowledge exchange is crucially dependent on the importance of knowledge exchange for the employees' job. Thus, the importance of knowledge exchange for the own job should influence the intention to exchange knowledge. But the importance of knowledge exchange alone does not suffice to elicit the adoption of a new technology such as social media, if the status quo regarding knowledge exchange is perceived as satisfactory. If the tools that are already available satisfy the actual needs of the employees regarding knowledge exchange, changes in knowledge sharing behavior should be unlikely. If employees, however, perceive deficits in knowledge exchange, their readiness to change their behavior should be all the higher. In line with this reasoning, theorizing on organizational change (and that is what introducing new technologies is) has long stated that dissatisfaction with the present state is required to overcome resistance to change (Beckhard & Harris, 1987). Therefore, we consider the perception of deficits in knowledge exchange as a critical moderator of the impact of importance of knowledge exchange for the own job on the intention to use social media for this purpose. In other words, an employee's job may require a high extent of knowledge exchange which renders knowledge exchange all the more important, but only if that employee perceives deficits regarding the current knowledge exchange s/he will change her/his behavior with regard to making use of offered social media tools. Therefore, we hypothesize:

H1. The more important knowledge exchange is for the own job, the stronger will be the intention to use social media for knowledge exchange, but only in case of high (compared to low) perceived deficits in knowledge exchange.

2.2. Instrumentality: usefulness of social media for knowledge exchange

When implementing a new technology, it is of great importance to emphasize its instrumentality. Employees will only use it if they believe that the technology will serve the purpose it is designed for (i.e., it is instrumental; Hertel et al., 2003). In the context of implementing social media for knowledge exchange in organizations this implies, the more employees believe that using social media

will be instrumental for improving knowledge exchange, the more they will be willing to use it. In accordance with this assumption, there is also evidence in the literature on technology acceptance and utilization for the significant role of the instrumentality component. The Technology Acceptance Model 2 (TAM2; Venkatesh & Davis, 2000) suggests for instance that perceived usefulness – a concept that is similar to instrumentality – has a direct effect on technology utilization. Numerous studies supported this prediction also in the context of social media use (e.g., Chang & Yang, 2013; McGowan et al., 2012; Moesser, Moryson, & Schwenk, 2013; Yu, Lu, & Liu, 2010). Thus, we hypothesize concerning usefulness:

H2. The higher the perceived usefulness of social media for knowledge exchange, the stronger will be the intention to use social media for knowledge exchange.

2.3. Expectancy: experience in using social media

Research has shown that expectancy facilitates knowledge sharing, that means the more confident individuals feel in sharing knowledge, the more likely they are to share own knowledge (Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005; Stantchev et al., 2014; Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Yoo, Han, & Huang, 2012). But in the early phase of technology implementation, when the future users have not yet worked with or not even seen the new technology, expectancy is hard to capture. In such an early phase, the usage experience with social media that employees bring along might be a good indicator of expectancy. Even when the tools are used for non-work purposes, employees develop skills and insights into what the tools can do (Archambault & Grudin, 2012). One would assume that frequent social media use is associated with felt higher ability to reach one's goal by doing so. Therefore, in this study expectancy is operationalized as experience in using social media beyond the current job. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3. The more experience in using social media, the stronger will be the intention to use social media for knowledge exchange at work.

We aimed to investigate two components of knowledge exchange: knowledge seeking and knowledge contribution, because ensuring the sustainability of an internal knowledge management platform requires employee participation in terms of knowledge seeking and contributing. From a knowledge market perspective, a lack of either one of these activities would render the knowledge exchange process incomplete and ineffective (Davenport & Prusak, 1998). High information need can certainly not be satisfied if no one contributes his or her knowledge. At the same time it seems absurd to invest effort in taking down information when no one is going to read it. Therefore it is essential to understand how to promote and balance both activities (Wenger, 1998).

3. Method

3.1. Participants

A cross-sectional study within an internationally operating company tested the three hypotheses. The data collection took place as part of a company-wide need analysis. The purpose of this need analysis was (a) to assess the current status and needs regarding knowledge exchange and (b) to inform all employees about a new project that aims at implementing a company-wide communication and collaboration platform. The link to the online survey was sent via email to 1527 employees having an own

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