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Linking dimensions of social media use to job performance: The role of social capital

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ABSTRACT

Organizations are increasingly adopting new technologies, such as social media, that afford employees a repertoire of uses not simply focused on work, but also on socialization and entertainment. Knowledge regarding the impact of such diverse technologies on job performance, however, is currently limited. This study adopts a technology use lens to study the effect of three categories of social media use – social, hedonic, and cognitive – on job performance, as mediated by three dimensions of social capital. The research was conducted via a large-scale survey within a multinational Information Technology company. Social and cognitive uses of technology were empirically shown to have a positive, albeit indirect, effect on employees' routine and innovative job performance. Hedonic use of the technology, while having a direct negative impact on routine performance was shown to positively contribute to the development of social ties, leading to a mitigating positive influence on innovative performance. This interesting positive side of hedonic use, along with all findings from our study, are discussed and used to offer insights to future research and practice.

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Introduction

New technologies bring capabilities not previously available to organizations. Indeed, technological innovations like social media have enriched organizations and enabled a multitude of uses and capabilities from creating new business models and marketing techniques, to improving demand predictions, enabling new management practices and learning practices, and enhancing innovation, knowledge sharing, collaboration and communication (Aral et al., 2013; Bughin and Chui, 2013; Urquhart and Vaast, 2012). It is not surprising then that social media has been broadly characterized as fundamentally changing the way we communicate, collaborate, consume, and create (Aral et al., 2013, p3). Social media's amplified importance is also reflected by a growing body of literature on this topic (Claussen et al., 2013) and yet existing scholarship only represents a fraction of what can be revealed about social media's present and future impact in the workplace. Further research is needed to fill knowledge gaps on social media and its use (Aral et al., 2013). Accordingly, the research question addressed in this paper is as follows: *if, and to what extent, does the impact of social media on routine and innovative job performance vary depending on how it is used?* This question is all the more interesting because social media can be used in a multitude of ways, not all immediately perceived as conducive to performance.

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A topical example is the great debate within management circles about the potentially negative effect of some social media uses on employee productivity. As a consequence of this concern, many companies have banned social media applications like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram from the workplace (Economist, 2011; Fister Gale, 2013; Microsoft, 2013). In response to these restrictions and prohibitions, this paper takes a critical look at the consequence these drastic measures may yield. In particular, we focus on the possibility that in-office restriction of social media use – even the seemingly disruptive hedonic use – may prevent companies from achieving business benefits (Bughin and Chui, 2013; Fister Gale, 2013; Huy and Shipilov, 2012; Microsoft, 2013; Miller and Tucker, 2013).

The importance of use context

While the term “social media” is an umbrella term for a range of tools and applications, several common threads exist. First, these tools are social in nature, supporting interactions among people. Second, they are commonly referred to as grassroots technology, with use emerging from employees and percolating up the organization. Finally, many social media tools can be used both at work and at home, obscuring the boundary between these two contexts. These characteristics raise an interesting question concerning *how* social media is used by different people, and how these different uses affect job performance.

IT usage is a core variable in IS research and practice. Researchers are interested in IT usage because it is often seen as a strong indicator of IS success (DeLone, 2003; DeLone and McLean, 1992; Petter et al., 2008), and it plays an important role in models of IS acceptance, implementation, and decision making outcomes (Barki et al., 2007; Burton-Jones and Straub, 2006). Practitioners are interested in IT usage because it is necessary for deriving benefits from- and assessing the business value of – IT (Boynton et al., 1994; Straub et al., 1995). Individual-level IT usage has been conceptualized as a three-way system comprised of the individual user, an IT artifact, and a task (Barki et al., 2007; Burton-Jones and Straub, 2006). According to this view, IT usage occurs when an individual uses features of an IT artifact to accomplish a task that is associated with a predefined individual or organizational goal. Drilling deeper into the notion of differentiated usage, affordances theory indicates that the actions available (afforded) to a person depend upon, and emerge from, an interaction between the person's abilities and the properties of objects in the person's environment (Chemero, 2003; Gibson, 1977; Stoffregen, 2003). Perceiving affordances depend on one's goals (Chemero, 2003; Gaver, 1991; Stoffregen, 2003). Hence, a social media application such as Facebook can be perceived as providing an affordance of entertainment for those using it to browse posts or play games, or it can be perceived as affording access to knowledge and expertise by those using it to solicit advice from their community of friends. Hence, IT usage is a complex phenomenon that requires additional conceptualizations (Barki et al., 2007; Burton-Jones and Straub, 2006).

Returning to social media as the IT artifact of interest, while there appears to be anecdotal evidence that the use of specific tools can positively impact employee productivity and performance within the workplace (e.g. Fister Gale, 2013; Gray et al., 2011; Microsoft, 2013; Wu, 2013), there is still a need to understand the relationship between *different use contexts* of social media and their impact on performance. For example, the usage of LinkedIn can afford a socialization benefit as well as knowledge sharing and dissemination. Similarly, YouTube can be used for entertainment as well as training and recruitment. Consequently, this paper takes a use-focused approach to understanding the impact of social media on organizations.

Social media use, social capital, and job performance

In what follows, we describe a study that links three key dimensions of social media use to employee performance: *social* use, *hedonic* use, and *cognitive* use. These dimensions refer, respectively, to the use of social media to build and maintain social relations; the use of social media to relax and entertain; and the use of social media to create and distribute user-generated content. We link these three use dimensions to two critical aspects of job performance: *routine* job performance and *innovative* job performance. Routine job performance refers to activities carried out in a consistent and dependable fashion; innovative job performance refers to activities that extend beyond routine requirements to provide novel and useful outcomes (Katz, 1964). The link between uses and job performance lies in the various ways in which social media can be used to enhance individuals' social capital. This social capital, as both this paper and others have argued, ultimately impacts the nature and quality of employee job performance (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Burt, 2005; Seibert et al., 2001; Teigland and Wasko, 2003, 2009).

This paper proceeds as follows. First, a literature review and research model discussing dimensions of social media use, social capital and job performance is provided. Next, the paper details its working hypotheses in light of established theories. Empirical data gathered from a study of a large multinational Information Technology company employees' interactions with social media is then presented and analyzed. Then, a discussion of this study's findings and its corresponding recommendations concludes the paper.

Literature review and research model

This research originates from the view that social media use can exert a positive effect on social capital, and that social capital, in turn, has a positive effect on individual job performance. This high level mediated relationship flow is shown in Fig. 1.

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