Social Media and Value Creation: 
Exploring the Perception of Generation Y toward 
Corporate Social Networking Applications Use

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ABSTRACT

Organizations increasingly rely on corporate social networks and online communities, under what is called today Enterprise 2.0, to enhance socialization and favor information/knowledge sharing, collaboration and value creation among coworkers. Researchers and practitioners to date have mostly assumed that people from this generation Y, because of their massive use of social media in the private arena, would be willing to accept and use them more easily and quickly in corporate environment. However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical work which has been reported on this issue confirming this assumption.

KEYWORDS

Generation Y, Social Networking Applications, Social Networks, Use, Value Creation

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the social aspect of the Web was emphasized by Tim O’Reilly (2005) to highlight the value of socialization related to people connections, content sharing and co-creation through social networks. Internet user is no longer considered as an information consumer but more as a content producer. To the point that in 2006 Time magazine titled its coverage “You.” (Yes, you. You control the Information Age. Welcome to your world). Indeed, this magazine used to devote coverage to the person of the year since the late 1920s.

The idea of this study lets internet user, by expressing themselves freely on the web and interacting directly with others, to control the information entirely (by support of the Social Web 2.0) which makes, in somewhat, a break with the traditional web.

Today, integrating Web 2.0 applications (i.e. social media) in businesses provides many opportunities to improve interaction, information/knowledge sharing and collaboration among employees, also with customers and partners. These applications have been a popular medium for people interaction, content sharing (Constant et al., 1994; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Cramton, 2001; Shi et al., 2014) and open collaboration (Coleman & Levine, 2008).

To date, companies increasingly rely on corporate social networking (CSN) applications (in the continuum of Intranet efforts) to enhance interactions, increase the density of connections and share information among coworkers for driving business value (Culnan et al., 2010) and innovation (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007; Sena & Sena, 2008).

According to many authors (Dudezert et al., 2009; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Boughzala, 2007-2012a; Deal et al., 2010; Gorman et al., 2004), the new generation of hypermodern employees (i.e. Generation Y) has developed new habits and behaviors at work. They use, on a daily basis, Web 2.0 applications (blogs, wikis, Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds, SN applications/services,
folksonomy, podcasting, tagging, mashups, etc) in the private arena and, therefore, consider that such applications for self-organizing, sharing and collaboration are the best tools to work. Social networks and online communities are for them the best resources to solve problems collectively, to get connections and partnerships and thus to take advantage of the collective intelligence (Smith & Duin, 1994; Malone et al., 2009; Beck et al., 2014). This generation is used to choose by itself the tools and devices it deems fit to use (notion of self-care, Bitmer et al., 2002). This is part of larger organizational issues, called BYOD (aka Bring Your Own Device), BYOA (aka Bring Your Own Application, Ballagas et al., 2004) or more BYOB (aka Bring Your Own Behavior, Gunnarsson, 2012).

Scholars and practitioners to date have mostly assumed that people from this generation Y (Dudezert et al., 2009; Hershatter & Epstein, 2010), because of their massive use of social media in the private arena, would be willing to accept and use them more easily and quickly in corporate environment under what we call Enterprise 2.0 (Crumpacker & Crumpacker, 2007; Deal et al., 2010). However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no empirical work which has been reported on this issue confirming this assumption on the ground. Nobody can affirm today that generation Y would be the driver of this technology adoption in corporate environment considering their technology readiness (Parasuraman, 2000).

This paper tries to address this gap by answering the following research questions: RQ1. How is the use of CSN applications perceived by the generation Y? RQ2. To what extent people from this generation are willing to accept and use them within a corporate environment? And, RQ3. What should be the best and worst use according to them?

A qualitative exploratory study through an enriched Delphi method (Briggs et al., 2003) is applied for answering research questions. Twenty four graduate management students from a French business school were invited to participate voluntarily to a directed brainstorming session, using a Group Support System (GSS), in order to gather their statements and opinions. This study provided an ordered list of important adoption issues to consider when implementing and using CSN applications in businesses.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of the perception of generation Y with regard to CSN applications by drawing up a list of dos and don’ts. It provides important expectations and precautions to take into account by stakeholders for a best use, compared to users (coworkers), managers and the enterprise at whole.

The rest of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the research background related to Web 2.0, generation Y and SN applications, and some related works and theories. Section 3 describes the research method that has been used in this exploratory study. Results are presented in section 4. Based on our findings, we discuss in section 5 their accordance with the technology acceptance and adoption models and theories; and present some guidelines associated with best CSN applications deployment and use. The conclusion discusses contributions, limitations and future research directions.

BACKGROUND

Web 2.0

Web 2.0 (O’Reilly, 2005) is one major technical change that is being transforming work practices and more widely the enterprise at whole. In fact, new usages for information and knowledge sharing have emerged with the advent of Web 2.0 applications, giving rise to the Enterprise 2.0 concept (Anderson, 2007). Enterprise 2.0 - a new culture of technology usage here - refers to “the use of Web 2.0, emergent social software platforms within companies, or between companies and their partners or customers” as defined initially by McAfee (2006).

Web 2.0 is a combination of applications (Blog, Wiki, Podcast, RSS feeds, Tagging, Social networks...); new values related to the use of these applications (user as producer, collective intelligence, perpetual beta, extreme ease of use) and standardized technology behind these applications (Ajax, XML, Open API, Microformats, Flash/Flex) (O’Reilly, 2005; Anderson, 2007).
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