Enterprise Social Media: 
Ethnographic Research on Communication 
in Entrepreneurial Teams

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ABSTRACT

This article reports an ethnographic research on effect of enterprise social media on communication of members in entrepreneurial teams. The researcher acted as an entrepreneur and as a team member in two entrepreneurial projects to observe the communication of team members within the enterprise social media. In addition to observation, he conducted some interviews with team members to collect supplementary data. A theoretical framework developed from an array of three metaphors: leaky pipe, echo chamber and social lubricant, and four organizational learning processes: social capital, boundary work, attention allocation and social analytics. By the interpretation of the collected data, a new metaphor of “living room” was proposed. This metaphor suggests that enterprise social media provide a space for interaction of internal-external people similar to what home members and guests do in a living room (public conversations), as well as possibility of conversation corners (private conversations).

KEYWORDS
Enterprise Social Media, Entrepreneurial Teams, Mediated Communication, Organizational Communication, Organizational Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

The entrepreneurial function need not be embodied in a physical person and in particular in a single physical person. Every social environment has its own ways of filling the entrepreneurial function. (Schumpeter, 1965, p. 51 cited in Harper, 2008)

A considerable portion of innovation, new product development, employment and economic development has been undertaken by entrepreneurial ventures and small enterprises (Salamzadeh and Kirby, 2017; Emami and Talebi, 2011). Especially in knowledge-intensive industries, entrepreneurial firms outperform single entrepreneurs (Lechler, 2001, p.265) and take advantage over large organizations for their innovativeness (Eliasson and Eliasson, 2005; Khajeheian and Tadayoni, 2016). When perform in an entrepreneurial team, individual entrepreneurs experience higher rates of success (Wu et al, 2010), because working in a team lowers entrepreneurial stress because of trust and support among team members (Lechter, 2001; Labafi, 2017). Thus, entrepreneurial teams react faster to

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the changes and complicate environment and have a greater capacity of opportunity identification, development and utilization (Wu et al, 2010, p. 857; Salamzadeh et al., 2017).

Considering these, understanding of entrepreneurial teams and how they might perform in optimum level has an importance in the economic success; and study of the interaction processes among these teams is part of this knowledge (Chowdhury, 2005; Saud Khan et al, 2014).

Vyakarnam et al (1997, p.2) define an entrepreneurial team as “the top team of individuals who is responsible for the establishment and management of business. Watson et al (1995, p.393) define it more specifically by inclusion of financial interest and size of enterprise: “A venture team is two or more individuals who jointly establish and actively participate in a business in which they have an equity (financial) interest”. Cooney defines entrepreneurial teams as “two or more individuals who have a significant financial interest and participate actively in the development of the enterprise” (2005, p.229). Harper (2008) in his theory of entrepreneurial teams characterizes these teams as entities that operate effectively by profit-seeking, problem-solving process under conditions of structural uncertainty. Respectively, and Implying on their effectiveness, Jariwala et al (2012) show that communication, coordination, structure, and leadership are important factors in team performance. Among these factors, nature of communication in entrepreneurial teams is a complicated one. As Lichter (2001) shows, teams carry the potential of inefficient communication, complex long-lasting decision processes and personal conflicts, and thereby, dysfunctions such as group losses, social loafing, group think, risk-shifting have been documented and seen in these teams frequently.

In regard of understanding success and failure of communication in entrepreneurial teams, many factors have been identified by previous researchers. Demographic diversity (Chowdhury, 2005), diversity in motivation (Knapp et al, 2015), relationship conflicts (Saud khan et al, 2015) differences in team members’ personalities, attitudes and values (Knapp et al, 2015) are some of the participating factors in effectiveness of team communication. Entrepreneurial teams must create an environment of trust and loyalty for improving team commitment. By Chowdhury (2005), entrepreneurs should collectively formulate an agreed-upon system of team interaction that encourages different approaches, points of views, alternatives and approaches of the team members.

Social Media are one of emerging communication tools that facilitates communication among and within the teams and organizations (Weber and Shi, 2017). Leonardi et al. define Enterprise social media as:

*Web-based platforms that allow workers to (1) communicate messages with specific co-workers or broadcast messages to everyone in the organization; (2) explicitly indicate or implicitly reveal particular co-workers as communication partners; (3) post, edit, and sort text and files linked to themselves or others; and (4) view the messages, connections, text, and files communicated, posted, edited and sorted by anyone else in the organization at any time of their choosing. (2013, p. 2)*

They point out that organizations use enterprise social media in two ways: for communication with external parties such as customers, vendors and the public at large; and for internal communication and social interaction within the enterprise.

In this research the author aims to study the enterprise social media in entrepreneurial startup teams to understand how these social media effect on communication, identity and culture of team members. Thus, the research question is: how enterprise social media effect on communication in entrepreneurial startup teams?

To this purpose, an ethnographic method has been selected. The reason behind this selection is the importance of understanding how team members act within the social media and to recognize the patterns of behavior and real actions beyond what they express. Two cases of Datmark and Nikimedia have been observed by the researcher and the actions that considered related with three categories of identity, culture and communication coded and interpreted.
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