Social-Media-Based Knowledge Sharing:
A Qualitative Analysis of Multiple Cases

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ABSTRACT

Social media continues to proliferate. This article presents a qualitative analysis of twelve cases of social-media-based knowledge sharing. The analysis reveals six categories of knowledge sharing in the social context. The analysis indicates that personalization of the organization entities and socialization of the participation on social media for knowledge sharing are two key success factors. The findings suggest that the social dimension, which has been absent from the traditional knowledge management models, broadens the scope of sustainable knowledge sharing practices in the digital society.

KEYWORDS

Digital Society, Knowledge Management, Knowledge Sharing, Multiple-Cases Analysis, Personalization, Qualitative Data Analysis, Social Dimension, Social Media

1. INTRODUCTION

Social media have been widely used in the society for social communication (Morehouse and Crandall, 2014), business (Berkman, 2013), healthcare (Harris, Mueller, and Snider, 2013), society (Collins et al., 2013), education (Field, Elbert, and Moser, 2012), politics (Shiraz, 2013), and government (Magro, 2012). One of the important motivations of people to use social media is knowledge sharing (Panahi, Watson, and Partridge, 2013; Ngai et al., 2015).

Social-media-based knowledge sharing has raised various interesting issues for the knowledge management community (Vuori and Okkonen, 2012; Chua and Banerjee, 2013; Nicolas-Rocca and Parrish 2013). Generally, social media are considered to be tools of communication or collaboration for the knowledge workers of the organization to implement the knowledge management process. However, social media play a significant role in providing massive diversified information in the social context beyond serving a set of communication tools for individual organizations. Thus, the social dimension of social-media-based knowledge sharing needs to investigate for knowledge management in the social context. Specifically, the following research questions are important to knowledge management: What types of knowledge do people share by using social media? What are the outcomes of knowledge sharing in successful cases, and what are the success factors for those cases? This paper provides a case analysis of twelve (12) cases social-media-based knowledge sharing. It reveals six (6) categories of knowledge sharing in the social context. The analysis also suggests that the scope of personalization and socialization in social-media-based knowledge sharing are broader.
than that in traditional knowledge management. The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 is an overview of the literature review to identify the cases for this case analysis. Section 3 describes the case analysis process. Section 4 presents the findings and suggestions. Section 5 discusses the limitations of this study. Finally, section 6 concludes the study.

2. QUALITATIVE DATA: MULTIPLE CASES OF SOCIAL-MEDIA-BASED KNOWLEDGE SHARING

To identify cases of social-media-based knowledge sharing, a literature review was conducted. The tools used for the literature review were the ABI/INFORM Global database and the Google search engine on the Internet. The keywords used for the search included “social media”, “social network”, “social media knowledge sharing case”, “social media knowledge management case”, “social media case”, “social media knowledge”, and “social network knowledge.” The ABI/INFORM database covers the major academic journals in the areas of social media, business, knowledge management, information systems, information technology, and social sciences. The Google search engine is powerful to reach the relevant web sites. Thus, the case collection for this study was considered sufficiently comprehensive. Surprisingly, the number of case studies of social-media-based knowledge sharing in the literature is relatively lower than what we expected, although social media have been used widely for a long time. Some papers mentioned case study of social-media-based systems, but the contents of knowledge sharing were light and not sufficient for qualitative data analysis. Subsequently, twelve (12) cases were found, and are summarized below.


In order for businesses to gain more from knowledge management through social media (that directly results in better operational results companywide), more emphasis should be given in defining a structure in such social media sites. A blend should be made of computer based sociality and computer based structure. Employees working on a certain problem should have the access and flexibility to inquire (post) about the issues in an online discussion on that topic. Similarly, other employees will share and benefit from each other’s queries and knowledge.

2.2. Case 2: Davenport (2008)

The article discusses how Enterprise 2.0 can give a well needed thrust to knowledge management. Enterprise 2.0 aims to help employees, customers and suppliers collaborate, share, and organize information via Web 2.0 technologies. Enterprise 2.0 is “the use of emergent social software platforms within companies, or between companies and their partners or customers.”

2.3. Case 3: Buczek and Harkins (2009)

Intel IT has deployed an enterprise-wide social computing platform that combines professional networking tools with social media such as wikis and blogs, and integrates with existing enterprise software. The case presents how Intel IT transformed collaboration across Intel while addressing top business challenges such as helping employees to find relevant information and expertise more quickly, breaking down silos; attracting and retaining new employees; and capturing the knowledge of knowledgeable employees.


The Business.com site is designed to help people find solutions to business challenges through resources such as the leading online B2B directory and over 30,000 business how-to guides. The potential to connect with target business decision maker audience through various social media channels was significant.
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