

# ENHANCING CREATIVITY OR WASTING TIME?: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF ADAPTABILITY ON SOCIAL MEDIA - JOB PERFORMANCE RELATIONSHIP

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## Abstract

*Social Media have been gaining in popularity worldwide over the last years at an increasingly grow in grate. Meanwhile, social media have penetrated in the workplace, affecting employees' work in many aspects. This paper aims to investigate the potential of social media on employees' job performance, and the underlying mechanism for how social media influence employees' job performance. In this paper, we propose that social media have positive effects on knowledge sharing and network ties, while the latter will contribute to better adaption to the network changes according to adaptive performance theory. In addition, a high level adaptability ensures that employees perform better in their work. However, empirical work is required to validate the proposed models, to this end, some empirical study plans are designed to collect subjective datasets. For the subjective data, surveys are scheduled among employees working in large IT companies. Expected theoretical and practical contribution of this study is discussed.*

*Keywords: Social media, Job performance, Network ties, Knowledge sharing, Adaptability*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The technological advances and the increased use of the internet in recent years have led to a communication revolution (Massari 2010; Moqbel et al. 2013). This communication revolution as well as the more technologically empowered lifestyle of the individual users has changed the way people communicate and connect with each other (Coyle & Vaughn 2008; O'Murchu et al. 2004). Social media is the recent trend of the revolution. The ubiquity of social media has penetrated in the workplace, facilitating organization communication and knowledge work was impossible in the past (McAfee 2006). Successful organization communication and knowledge management amongst organizational members play a key role on promoting employees' job performance. There have been many studies noting the potential of social media in employees' job performance. For example, in 2008, AT&T commissioned a study in Europe. They found that 65 percent of employees believed that the use of social media in the workplace helped them become more productive.

These studies have provided explanatory insights into the capabilities of social media. However, like other emerging technologies, social media, and their use by employees, have been controversial. There are some studies argue that the use of social media such as social networking sites leads to better employee productivity through effects on intermediate variables, such as higher morale (Bennett et al. 2010; Leidner et al. 2010; Li 2010; Patel & Jasani 2010; AT&T 2008). Leidner et al. (2010) found that the ability of employees to access Facebook at work was a great incentive for retention and organizational commitment – particularly of new hires, as they can be socially connected with family, friends, and other co-workers in the workplace, leading to a better work-life balance. On the other hand, others, likely reflecting employers' fear of the adverse effects of nonwork-related presenteeism (D'Abate & Eddy 2007), argue that employees' use of social media causes loss of labor productivity as a result of time wasted at work (Computing 2009; O'Murchu et al. 2004; Rooksby et al. 2009; Shepherd 2011; Nucleus 2009). For example, a study by Nucleus Research suggested that full access to Facebook alone at the workplace results in a 1.5 percent drop in productivity.

These studies have researched the potential of social media in employee's job performance in different perspective. Because of the positive effects of social media on work-life balance, Leidner et al. (2010) concluded that social media was a great incentive for job performance. In perspective of time wasted at work, Nucleus Research argued that the use of social media has a negative effect on employees' job performance. In 2013, Moqbel et al had an exploratory study on the relationship between organizational members' use of social networking sites and job performance, in the perspective of work-life balance and presentism.

However, all of these studies have paid little attention on employee's adaptability, which is a key factor to employees' job performance (Pulakos et al. 2000). Although adaptability is not a new concept, the pace and types of change we are experiencing only continue to grow, which has caused research sponsors, academic researchers, and practitioners in organizations to become increasingly interested in understanding and enhancing adaptability in the workplace. This study looks at the use of social media by employees in the perspective of adaptability for

several reasons. First, in global economy, employees need to be increasingly adaptable, versatile, and tolerant of uncertainty to operate effectively in these changing and varied environments. In other word, adaptability has become the most essential capabilities in this changing world. Second, social media such as Facebook and Twitter have experienced exponential growth in the past few years and are now all but omnipresent. Third, with the widespread use of social media, employees can not only share knowledge or experience at any time but also can strengthen their network ties with others at anyplace. No matter knowledge sharing or network ties, they all can help employees to become more adaptable to work effectively in a changing and varied environments.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The next section makes a literature review on social media, the potential of social media and adaptability theory. Then we propose a research model to investigate the potential of social media on employee's job performance based on adaptability theory. We argue that social media can facilitate employee's adaptability through knowledge sharing and network ties. Strong adaptability can promote employees' job performance. After describing the research methodology, we present plans to collect data for analysis. We conclude the paper with expected theoretical and practical implications and a summary.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Social Media**

Social media is the social interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Ahlqvist 2008). Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein defined social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010). Furthermore, social media depend on mobile and web-based technologies to create highly interactive platforms through which individuals and communities share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content.

Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein also made a comprehensive classification of social media in their influential paper. There are six different types of social media. In addition, after 2010 when the pervasive use of smartphone, a new type of social media, called mobile social media, is catching more and more attention (Kaplan 2012). So, there are seven types of social media: collaborative projects, blogs & micro-blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game world, virtual social world and mobile social media.

However, in this study, we will research on the use of general social media, not one of the above seven types of social media. There are two reasons for us to do that. First, it is so easy for a specific social media to acquire new functions. Take social networking sites for instance, micro-blogging services can be integrated in the webpages of social networking sites. As a result, it is inappropriate to refer to a specific social media but rather to a combination of social media. Second, different types of social media can have the same effect on employee's job performance. For example, the result of AT&T study is same as the result of the study

done by Leidner et al (2010), while the former study is based on blogs and the other is based on social networking sites.

## **2.2 The Potential of Social Media on Job Performance**

Several studies have been conducted on the potential relationship of social media and job performance, examining a variety of important aspect. For instance, North (2010) explored the benefits as well as the risks of the use of social networking sites in the workplace and concluded that employees believe that social networking site use in the workplace is worthwhile. This finding is not surprising, given that one of the primary objectives of using social media is to maintain and strengthen our network ties, which means that we can develop new relationships as well as to maintain existing relationships. Ellison et al. (2007) found a strong association between the intensity of use of Facebook and social capital and that using this social media can help certain users to deal with low self-esteem and low life satisfaction. The same study found that the ability of employees to access Facebook at work was a great incentive for the retention and organizational commitment of new hires as they can be socially connected with family, friends, and other co-workers in the workplace. Furthermore, Bennett et al. (2010) report that the benefits of social media use in the workplace can include enhanced collective knowledge, improved knowledge, increased productivity, and improved morale. In sum, the use of social networking sites by employees could lead to benefits to the employees' job performance.

On the other hand, some studies suggest that the use of social media in the workplace might lead to loss in employees' productivity. Indeed, it was found that full Facebook access in the workplace results in a 1.5 percent drop in productivity (Nucleus 2009). Social media use can be argued to lead to distraction, reducing individuals' task performance. For instance, in an academic setting, students, using social networking sites while studying, reported to have lower performance than their peers (Kirschner & Karpinski 2010). In addition, by blurring the boundaries between life and work realms, social media use by organizational members might cause home and leisure issues to interfere with job responsibilities, thereby resulting in diminished job performance (Allen et al. 2000; Kossek & Ozeki 1999).

## **2.3 Adaptability Theory**

As the nature of work is changing rapidly, employees' ability to learn new skills and adapt to various contexts becomes a prominent factor that helps organizations attain their objectives. Researchers have generally demonstrated that such adaptive performance is a component of overall performance that can be distinguished from task and contextual performance (Han & Williams 2008; Johnson 2001; Pulakos et al. 2000; Rosen et al. 2011). Pulakos et al.'s (2000) seminal work in this area has identified eight dimensions of adaptability. On the other hand, these components can generally be summarized as employees' ability to (a) work creatively and learn effectively, (b) manage stressful, adverse, unpredictable, and emergency situations, and (c) accommodate diverse social and cultural contexts (Allworth & Hesketh 1999; Moss et al. 2009). In this paper, we define employees' adaptability as the ability to handle work stress, adapt interpersonal behavior to work with new colleagues and accommodate to diverse cultural contexts.

Previous research has mainly focused on individual differences as predictors of individual adaptability (Ployhart & Bliese 2006; Pulakos et al. 2006). For example, general and specific cognitive abilities have been found to influence adaptability (Allworth & Hesketh 1999; Kozlowski et al. 2001) whereas the Big Five traits of openness to experience, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and extraversion have been demonstrated to be positively related to adaptability (Allworth & Hesketh 1999; Pulakos et al. 2006). On the other hand, a study of 230 private colleges over 16 turbulent year supported the argument that network ties mitigate uncertainty and promote adaptation by increasing communication and information sharing (Kraatz 1998). Similarly, knowledge sharing ensure a high level of employees' adaptability and facilitating employees' learning commitments to deal with dramatic, unpredicted, and unexpected environmental changes (Almahamid et al. 2010).

With employees' use of social media, network ties have been strengthened and employees can share knowledge more conveniently. Because of the positive effect of network ties and knowledge sharing on adaptive performance, social media can play a critical role in ensuring employees' adaptability. Meanwhile, employees with high adaptability can achieve excellent job performance (Niessen et al. 2010). As a result, this study will research the potential of social media on job performance in the perspective of adaptive performance or adaptability. Figure 1 depicts the research model:

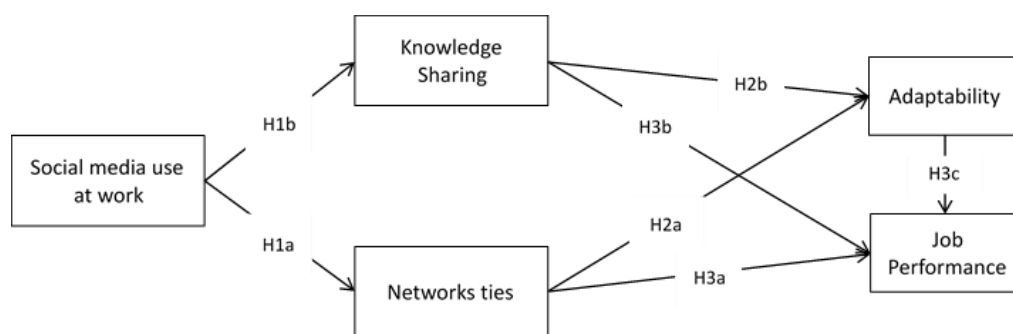


Figure 1. Research Model

### 3 THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

#### 3.1 The Effect of Using Social Media at Work

As an effective social networking platform, social media consist of bundles of information and communication tools, providing multiple communication channels in both social and work environments. Employees who use social media are not just sharing information and knowledge; they also regard them as a channel to meet friends, to obtain a sense of belonging and to develop relationships with other people. In this study, social media use at work is defined as the employee's use of social media to share work-related knowledge and to participate in socialization with colleagues.

Network ties represent the breadth and strength of relationships, and the communication frequency among employees (Chiu et al. 2006). Compare to traditional physical contacts, social media enable informal social interaction across space, time and organizational

boundaries. The maintenance and development of network ties no longer need to rely largely on face-to-face communication, but instead can rely on the virtual community created by social media, especially when employees work in different places or remotely. By connecting people with common interests and background, the deployment of social media in the workplace is helpful to discover potential ties, to maintain professional networks and to strengthen ties with colleagues.

For knowledge sharing technologies needed that support free-form communication and collaboration (Mitri 2003). Virtual communities based on social media are groups of people brought together by common interests and goals. In these virtual communities, because of social media's independence of space and time, as well as the characteristic of open communication, has created a new form of collaboration among individuals. With the advent of social media such as social web initiatives, it seems there now exist new opportunities to facilitate knowledge sharing among individuals (Hsia et al. 2006). According to Abidi et al. (2009), social web paradigm can be helpful for knowledge sharing through interactive and collaborative technologies, such as social networking and online discussion forums, where a community of specialized practitioners can share, critique and validate their collective experiential knowledge. Osimo (2008) and Steininger et al. (2010) have also argued that social media including social web platforms are particularly effective tools in facilitating tacit and informal knowledge sharing among individuals.

This study focuses on the potential of social media to augment social capital. Therefore, we propose the following:

**Hypothesis 1a:** Social media use at work enhances network ties among employees.

**Hypothesis 1b:** Social media use at work enhances knowledge sharing among employees.

### **3.2 Facilitating Adaptability**

Network ties to other individuals or organization can not only promote social learning of adaptive responses, but also can mitigate uncertainty and promote adaption by increasing communication and information sharing (Kraatz 1998). The breadth and heterogeneity of an organization's social ties may determine its access to different sorts of information, thus affecting its ability to recognize and respond to environmental threats. Besides, network ties can provide the opportunity for individuals to readily observe and communicate with peers. The supportive social network based on social media allow employees to share their positive or negative emotions with their colleagues. The emotion sharing thus lead to important organizational outcomes, such as group cohesion being enhanced. In other words, network ties can help employees to adapt to new organizational culture quickly and effectively.

Knowledge sharing is considered an important factor related to the ability of both employees and organizations to respond quickly to a changing business environment. The seminal book of Burke et al. (2006) shows that the adaptability can be achieved on three levels: individual, team, and organization. This study focuses on the individual adaptability that represents the solid base for team and organizational adaptability and is directly affected by the willingness of the individual to interact with other employees, which is also called "knowledge sharing". On the individual level, Pulakos et al. (2006) argued that there is a need for workers to be

more adaptable, versatile, and tolerant to do their work tasks efficiently and effectively especially under unexpected and unpredicted environmental changes. This need will be significant as long as change continues in a constant manner. Thus, it can be assumed that the only way of learning new skills and knowledge in a cost-effective manner will be through knowledge sharing. The logic is that knowledge sharing facilitates individual adaptability by providing individuals with new skills and knowledge that fit with the new environmental conditions. Given this, Bruque et al explore the relationship between individual informational networks and individual adaptation to changes related with tasks and work environment. They defined informational networks as relationships that are developed for provision and exchange of information and knowledge needed to accomplish work-related tasks. In their study, they made a conclusion that the stronger and denser the individual informational networks, the better the individual adaptability to changing environment and culture (Bruque et al. 2008). Therefore, we propose that:

**Hypothesis 2a:** Network ties enhance employees' adaptability.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Knowledge sharing enhances employees' adaptability.

### **3.3 Enhancing Job Performance with High Level Adaptability**

From the resource view of social network research, an employee's network ties positively influence access to resources that, in turn, serves as a critical mechanism contributing to job performance (Sparrowe et al. 2001). Meanwhile, in dynamic and uncertain environments, network ties partly guarantee resource reciprocity and availability, exceeding formal institutional support (Gómez 1998). An organization within which knowledge sharing takes place will develop its human capital, i.e., competencies of human resources, through knowledge transfer and exchange (Quinn et al. 1996; Widen-Wulff & Suomi 2007). As organizational human capital is developed, human resources can improve their job performance. In a word, network ties and knowledge sharing are expected to improve employees' job performance.

In stressful and emergency situations, high level of adaptability to handle stress with social media leads to a greater satisfaction and a good work-life balance. Wang et al find out that employees' high adaptability to work stress can promote their needs-supplies fit and demands-abilities fit, which both can help individuals to enhance their job performance (Wang et al. 2011). Meanwhile, in order to be effective when work environment change, individuals have to adapt to the direct consequences of change (Niessen et al. 2010). Adaptive behaviors such as social connection help individuals to cope with new task demands, which results in an increase of task performance (R. Dawis & Lofquist 1984; R. V. Dawis 2005). With high cultural adaptability, employees can quickly adapt to a new organizational culture and thus have a better identifications with the organization. Moreover, it is also proven that high cultural adaptability can influence the person-organization fit and thus lead to a better job performance and job satisfaction (Wang et al. 2011). According to the above analysis, we propose that:

**Hypothesis 3a:** Network ties enhance employees' job performance.

**Hypothesis 3b:** Knowledge sharing enhances employees' job performance.

**Hypothesis 3c:** High level of adaptability enhances employees' job performance.

## **4 RESEARCH METHOD**

### **4.1 Measures**

The independent variable, social media use at work, was adapted from Moqbel et al. (2013), after making some wording modifications, such as replacing “social networking” with “social media”. Indicators of network ties latent variable were adapted from Levin and Cross (2004). Indicators of knowledge sharing were adapted from Lee (2001). The measurement of adaptability was adapted from Charbonnier-Voirin et al. (2010). The latent variable, job performance was also adapted from Moqbel et al. (2013). The indicators were measured on five-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). See Appendix for a description of the complete measurement instrument used.

### **4.2 Data Collection**

In order to test the validity of the model, data collection has become an essential step in the implementation of experiment. We can employ a paper-based survey to collect data on a voluntary basis from employees in China, all comes from Chinese large IT companies such as Tencent and Alibaba. There are two reasons for that we do a survey among employees in large IT companies. First, almost every IT company has a rule that their own employees must use their own social media. For instance, Laiwang is the mandatory intranet communication tool for every employee of Alibaba. Second, most of them are able to adapt a new social media quickly, mainly because they are familiar with high technology. In addition, considering that employees can use variety social media for different purposes, the respondents have to be asked to answer questions based on their experience with the social media they used most frequently at work.

## **5 SUMMARY**

In this changing world, adaptability is becoming the most important capability for employees. In other word, adaptability is the key factor to employees' job performance (Pulakos et al. 2000). While most existing studies mainly explore how social media influence employees' job performance in the perspective of work-life balance and wasted time, it is necessary to incorporate the impact of social media on adaptive performance to fully understand the influence of social media on organizational performances. Therefore, in this study, a mechanism based on adaptive performance theory is studied. In the mechanism, social media is expected to play a positive role in promoting knowledge sharing and strengthen network ties, thus enhancing individuals' adaptability to changing environment. Besides, a good adaptability ensures that employees can perform effectively in the workplace. To test the mechanism, we propose a plan to collect subjective data. Considering the fact that employees who work in large IT companies may be familiar with social media, we plan to do a survey among them to collect subjective data.



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