

Chapter 22

Antecedents and Consequences of Adopting Social Networking Technologies for Knowledge Sharing in Small Firms:

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines factors, which affect web 2.0 knowledge sharing and its effect on organizational innovation in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The study also investigates whether web 2.0 knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between HR (Human Resource) practices and innovation. The proposed research model and its associated hypotheses were tested by using structural equation modelling on a dataset of 552 SMEs. Results suggest that technological and organizational factors are positively associated with web 2.0 knowledge sharing in Ss, while the contrary is found with regard to vertical competition. In addition, results show that web 2.0 knowledge sharing positively influence innovation and that web 2.0 knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between Human Resource (HR) practices and innovation in SMEs.

INTRODUCTION

The Web 2.0 (or social web) constitutes an internet-based digital platform that enables the creation of social networks, facilitating information dissemination and knowledge sharing (Joo and Normatov, 2013; Palacios-Marqués et al., 2015a; Pan, 2012; Paroutis and Al Saleh, 2009; Sigala and Chalkiti, 2014). Consequently, firms are deploying Web 2.0 technologies such as social networking, wikis, and internal blogging to improve collaboration and Web 2.0 knowledge sharing within their boundaries (Levy, 2009;

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Lim et al., 2010; Xin et al., 2014). In addition, although the literature suggests that findings from studies examining KM practices in large companies are unlikely to be generalisable to SMEs, very few and recent studies focus on this specific type of firms (Chan et al., 2012; Huy et al., 2012; Lopez-Nicolas and Soto-Acosta, 2010). Meanwhile, SMEs are of enormous importance for economic growth, employment and wealth creation. For example, in Europe, SMEs represent around 99% of the total number of firms.

Extant research has demonstrated that, although firms have extensively adopted internet technologies, technology use is an important link to business value and that such link is sometimes limited especially in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Devaraj & Kohli, 2003; Zhu & Kraemer, 2005). In this sense, studies in SMEs suggest that, although having a proper information technology (IT) infrastructure can facilitate knowledge creation, it does not necessarily mean that knowledge is created (Lopez-Nicolas & Soto-Acosta, 2010). Thus, implementing IT applications, by itself, is not enough to ensure a better outcome in terms of knowledge sharing. Knowledge will not necessarily circulate freely firm wide just because accurate IT to support such circulation is available (Brown & Duguid, 2000). Therefore, it is important to understand the key factors that facilitate and motivate Web 2.0 knowledge sharing in SMEs. Beyond technological and environmental factors, existing investigation has recognized the importance of organizational factors in influencing internet-based technologies adoption and use (Gu et al., 2012). Organizational factors may constrain or facilitate the implementation and usage of Web 2.0 technologies for knowledge sharing. For instance, the literature suggests that organizational human resource (HR) practices that create a commitment-based environment may affect the organizational social climate that motivates employees to work together and share knowledge (Collis and Smith, 2006), since these practices influence the interactions, behaviours and motivation of employees. In contrast, for instance, performance pressure has been found to undermine knowledge sharing (Gardner, 2012).

Furthermore, one of the main characteristics of the Internet-based technology is that it is founded on the democratization of knowledge, so it facilitates the appearance of natural flows of collaboration and knowledge, which, in turn, may favour creativity and innovation (Pérez-López & Alegre, 2012; Popa et al., 2016). In this sense, literature suggests that knowledge is an antecedent of innovation through organizational learning (Lopez-Nicolas & Soto-Acosta, 2010; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Templeton et al., 2002). Although there is research that has analyzed the relationship between KM and innovation (Darrow, 2005; López-Nicolás & Meroño-Cerdán, 2011), little is known about whether and how different factors promote or hinder Web 2.0 knowledge sharing and the effect of Web 2.0 knowledge sharing on innovation in SMEs. To delve into these questions, this paper develops an integrative conceptual model to assess the effect of different factors on Web 2.0 knowledge sharing and its effect on innovation in SMEs. In addition, this study analyzes whether Web 2.0 knowledge sharing mediates the relationship between commitment-based HR practices and innovation. With this aim in mind, the rest of our study is organized as follows. Next, the literature review and hypotheses are presented. Following that, the research methods drawing from a sample of 552 SMEs are described. Then, data analysis and results are examined and, finally, conclusions, limitations and future research guidelines are presented.

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