

# Chapter 10

## Becoming a Blogger: A Social Knowledge Experiment

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter contributes to social knowledge theory and provides a practical approach for managing social media. This study investigates how knowledge is created, transferred, and shared in social media and proposes a way to manage social knowledge. Qualitative research methods are applied to collect data through in-depth individual semi-structured interviews, think-aloud protocols, focus groups, and document analysis. Data analysis is pursued with the use of the qualitative software package Atlas.ti®. This study contributes to our understanding of how a community of people creates, transfers, and shares knowledge in a virtual social environment, i.e. a Web log. Findings revealed that knowledge transfer was the primary knowledge process in the management of the Web log and highlighted common issues, concerns, and suggestions on how to develop a more effective virtual social environment. Limitations in the creation, transfer, and sharing of knowledge are discussed, and recommendations on how to improve a Web log are provided for practice.*

*“The outcomes of the blog open a gateway for new venues in my personal knowledge” [Participant 2]*

### INTRODUCTION

Web logs (or Blogs) are tools to foster collaboration and interactions among users. The first blog appeared on the Internet in 1997 (Lyons, 2005) even though online personal diaries have emerged

on the World Wide Web since 1994 (Sullivan, 2005). Along with MySpace, Facebook, YouTube, Flickr, and Wikipedia, Web logs are considered as the backbone of Web 2.0, a term coined to embody the new Internet advancement where knowledge is socially constructed and distributed. The social construction of knowledge is recognized as a source of competitive advantage by

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many organizations (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Dixon, 2000). These organizations have started using social media, e.g. wikis for collaboration, and social networking tools for connecting people, to develop flexible and intuitive solutions and facilitate participation and communication. The use of social media has contributed to shift the *need-to-know* organizational paradigm to the *need-to-share* organizational paradigm (Girard, 2010) increasing the importance of a collaborative working environment where individuals feel free to disseminate what they know for the benefit of the organization. Despite this increased interest in the use of social media, however not all organizations have achieved the desired level of knowledge sharing nor have they identified an effective way to manage social knowledge.

The purpose of this study is to provide empirical support for the management of social media. This study explores how a community of people creates, transfers, and shares knowledge in social media, i.e. a Web log which is defined as a site about a person or company that is usually updated daily (Robbins & Judge, 2010). The goal is to develop a conceptual framework on the management of knowledge in social media. Another purpose is to provide evidences about factors influencing the process of knowledge creation, transfer, and sharing in Web logs, and recommendations for the design and implementation of Web logs in organizations. In this study social knowledge is defined as the use of social media to create, transfer, and preserve organizational knowledge with a view to achieving the organizational vision (Girard, 2010). In the following sections, the theoretical basis regarding knowledge management, social media, and social knowledge is presented. Follows a comprehensive description of the qualitative methodology used to collect and analyze data. Findings are shown by means of quotations from interview transcriptions derived from the use of the qualitative software package Atlas.ti®. Theoretical and managerial implications

regarding the results of this study are presented and future research is discussed.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions follow from the purpose of the study. They were designed to provide enough direction without being too restrictive. They are as follows:

1. RQ: How are social media used to manage knowledge?
2. RQa: What are the main impediments to the management of knowledge in social media?
3. RQb: What are the recommendations to the management of knowledge in social media?

## **RELEVANT LITERATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

### **Knowledge Management, Social Media, and Social Knowledge**

Academic and practitioners have long been considering knowledge creation (Nonaka, 1994), transfer (Van Wijk, Van Den Bosch & Volberda, 2003), and sharing (Hayes & Walsham, 2003) as crucial knowledge management processes for the success of contemporary organizations (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Dixon, 2000).

Research has extensively investigated the role of individuals (Cook & Brown, 1999) and information technology (Alavi & Tiwana, 2003) in the management of organizational knowledge and has pointed out the formal and informal aspects of the management of knowledge to make individual expertise available to the other members of the organization (Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Snowden, 2003). The attention has been focused on the informal interactions of individuals (Nonaka, 1994), and on the creation of communities of practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Hornett & Stein, 2009; Dalkir, Bilodeau, & Wiseman, 2004), or social networks (Cross, Parker, Prusak, &

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