

Social Media and its Role in Knowledge Sharing among Employees at Workplace

Savita Saini^a, Shivinder Phoolka^b

^a *Research scholar, School of Management studies, Punjabi University, Patiala.*

^b *Assistant Professor, Punjabi University Regional Centre for Information Technology and Management, Mohali.*

Abstract

Knowledge sharing is an important ingredient for any organization's success. No organization can survive for long in the absence of proper knowledge management. Social media is a contemporary concept and is proving to be very useful for the purpose of knowledge sharing. The paper is based on the review of the studies already done in this context. In this article an attempt is made to throw some light on the concept of knowledge sharing in an organization and social media. The paper also studies the barriers that affect the flow of knowledge sharing in an organization and to understand the role of social media in this concern. The paper has also tried to limn the views of the researchers on the implementation of social media tools at the workplace. Overall the study supports the use of social media at workplace for knowledge sharing purpose as it has the potency to overcome many barriers that resist the knowledge sharing in an organization.

Keywords: *Social media, Knowledge sharing, Employees, Workplace.*

Introduction

Today is an era of knowledge management and knowledge sharing being an important part of it. Knowledge sharing is the most crucial part that guarantees knowledge management of an organization. A firm needs continuous knowledge sharing amongst its employees for its survival and growth. Knowledge sharing adds to the new knowledge in the organization. Knowledge management includes all the activities of creating, converting and transforming the appropriate information from the right person to the right person at right place and at right time (Akram, Lei, Haider, Hussain, & Puig, 2017).

For this there needs to be an environment of trust and community building in the organization. So that the employees' intentions to share knowledge can be generated. People in the organization acquire knowledge and store it with them. For sharing that knowledge, intentions to share and behaviours for it is required (Chow & Chan, 2008). An organization where there is culture for sharing knowledge can work much better than those without it. A proper knowledge management in an organization helps in gaining competitive advantage by retaining employees, reducing employee turnover, increasing their productivity and developing intellectual capital for an organization (Razak, et al., 2016). This paper will focus on how social media is playing its role in knowledge sharing among employees at workplace.

Theoretical Background

Knowledge sharing

Knowledge can be either tacit or explicit. Explicit knowledge is the one which can be codified and can be explained in writing or symbols. It is related to facts, rules, policies etc. (Matzler, Renzl, Muller, Herting, & Mooradian, 2008). It is more formal in nature and easier to communicate through books, manuals, prints etc. Another type is tacit or implicit knowledge which is related to routine practice and cannot be codified into writing or symbols. Most of the knowledge is tacit in nature. Tacit knowledge is difficult to share as it is more subjective and requires more interactions among the individuals. It is difficult to transmit tacit knowledge as it calls for drawing pictures and various other methods of expressing it. It has to be reached to the level of subconscious of a person (Razak, et al., 2016). So, it can be said tacit or implicit knowledge is subjective and needs more efforts to share where as explicit knowledge is formal and objective in nature and is quite easier to articulate and transmit.

(Hooff & Ridder, 2004) knowledge sharing means exchange of knowledge whether tacit or explicit between the individuals and creation of new knowledge in the process. So, knowledge according to them can be donated or collected. Knowledge donation i.e. giving and communicating others the knowledge or the intellect possessed by oneself. Knowledge collection is consulting and talking to the fellow beings to acquire their knowledge.

It is difficult to acquire and manage knowledge due to its implicit nature (Zaffar & Ghazawneh, 2012).

(Zaffar & Ghazawneh, 2012) in their study discussed about knowledge cycle which consists of;

(a)*Internalization* which means the process of gaining or capturing knowledge from the organization. Organization develops many systems for peer to peer sharing of information and knowledge within the business.

(b)*Externalization* i.e. the process when individual share and exchange knowledge with each other for reuse. It can be both ways formal or informal. Formal channels include meetings, projects, seminars etc and informal can be chatting during lunch hours or in any informal way. Knowledge transfer leads to knowledge development.

(c)*Objectification*: exchanging of knowledge does not serve any useful purpose until it is accepted by the organization. This is the process which takes the longest time because acquiring and transferring the knowledge serves no purpose until it is accepted by the organization as a whole. So, the objectification is the process of making the knowledge global.

(d)*Intermediation*: This is another important concept which the research introduced in the cycle as it is the process which connects knowledge seeker with the knowledge provider. It talks of SECI model which means (i) Socialization- converting tacit to tacit knowledge (ii) Externalization- articulating tacit to explicit knowledge (iii) Combination- converting explicit to explicit knowledge (iv) Internalization- converting explicit to tacit knowledge.

(Benbya, Passiante, & Belbaly, 2004) gave four phases of knowledge process at workplace which includes (i) knowledge creation i.e. generation of knowledge by acquiring it (ii) knowledge storage which means organising the knowledge in the form of data base or manuals (iii) knowledge distribution or making the knowledge formal which includes the process of distributing the knowledge amongst the members in the organization and the last step in the knowledge process is (iv) knowledge application i.e. applying or using the knowledge in the enterprise for work related matters.

Barriers to knowledge sharing

(Riege, 2005) mentioned about many barriers to knowledge sharing in the organisation. The researcher talked of three levels of barriers (a) *individual* (b) *organizational* and (c) *technological barriers*:

Individual level barriers

The individual barriers are the barriers from an employee point of view which includes lack of time, perception of harm to job security, lack of awareness about the benefits of sharing knowledge, status bars, grudges and frictions among the employees, lack of interaction between knowledge collector and giver, poor communications/ writing skills, different experience levels of employees, age gaps, gender differences, no social network systems, different education levels, lack of mutual trust, apprehensions related to misuse of the information, fear of losing intellectual property or know how, absence of good source of information and differences in the language and the culture of the employees.

Organizational level barriers

The obstacles from the level of organization in sharing knowledge at workplace are organizational level barriers. It includes missing alignment of knowledge management strategies with the company's goals, lack of communication regarding benefits of knowledge sharing, formal and informal space barriers for generating new knowledge, lack of reward

systems for recognition and motivations for sharing knowledge, lack of support from existing business culture, no priorities are set for knowledge retention, lack of infrastructure, lack of resources for sharing knowledge, inter organizational competitiveness, top- down approach for knowledge sharing, layout of the workplace restricts knowledge sharing and lastly, in large sized organizations knowledge sharing becomes unmanageable.

Technological level barriers

Technological barriers are the barriers related to the use of technology in the organization. These are missing co-ordination between IT systems and processes which delays the way of doing work of the people, lack of internal or external IT support may restrict the communication flow, lack of awareness about the technology, incompatibility between different IT systems and processes, differences in individual needs and integrated IT systems and processes, ignorance to use IT systems due to reluctance caused by lack of knowledge to use them, lack of training employees to use the technology and lack of educating employees regarding the benefits of technology.(Vuori & Okkonen, 2012) Employees compare their efforts with the gain. If they find adopting social media for knowledge sharing is wasting their time they will not use it.

Social media

Social media can be defined as an internet-based platform where the users come closer, communicate with one another, share knowledge and create communities and has a mass reach.(El Quirdi, El Quirdi, segers, & Henderickx, 2015). Social networking is using internet to create a profile for network building that connects an individual with others for personal or work-related reasons. It uses various tools for it like social websites, sharing photos, video sharing, professional network sharing sites etc.(Dawley, 2009)

Social media is a platform where people connect to each other online. It has been defined by Merriam- Webster dictionary, which says social media is a form of e-communication through which individuals create communities and share information, ideas, personal messages and other contents like videos(Edosomwan, Prakasan, Kouame, Watson, & Seymour, 2011).

Social interactions in social media can take place in four forms: providing knowledge, providing support to virtual communications between human, building bonds and facilitating cooperation at the workplace(Fuchs, 2014). There are different kinds of social media. It can be in the form of blogs, content communities, websites (e.g. Facebook) and online gaming(Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Role of social media in knowledge sharing

Social media has changed the way people used to communicate, interact and share views. It is becoming an important platform these days for knowledge sharing (Ahmed, Ahmad, Ahmad, & Zakaria, 2018).(Panahi, Watson, & Partridge, 2012) found five factors that are needed for sharing of tacit knowledge. These were social interaction, sharing of experiences, observations, informal relationships and mutual trust. These elements were mapped against social media concept and it was found that social media complies with many of the requirements. It provides platform to the users for coming together, share their experiences, observations and bind together. So, it has a positive role in sharing tacit knowledge.

(Ellison, Gibbs, & Weber, 2015) talked of positive effects of internal network i.e. employee social networking sites (ESNSs) on knowledge sharing within the organization and found that

employees sometimes feel shy in asking questions in public. So, internal social media is helpful for those employees as they can by this way communicate with each other internally without any hesitations. But the paper also viewed that when the messages are sent in a hurried way, it may lead to typographical errors sometimes.

(Nielson & Razmerita, 2014) found that employees are the centre for knowledge sharing and social media can facilitate knowledge sharing in an organization in a more effective way. The study viewed knowledge sharing from a different perspective and found that sharing of knowledge in an organization is not a social dilemma. The employees do not want to hoard knowledge instead they like to share their knowledge because they consider it to be more beneficial. But very few people have adopted social media and most of them use traditional way of communicating with each other. But overall social media's role in knowledge sharing and internal communication was increasing found to be positive in the organization. (Bharati, Zhang, & Chaudhary, 2015) too in their study found a positive association between social media and knowledge management through the theoretical framework of social capital. The study found, as the usage of social media grows in an organization it leads to growth of social capital in the organization which in turns facilitates growth of knowledge management and ultimately affects the quality of knowledge in the organization.

Higher the level of social media usage or exploitation more it leads to employee knowledge sharing and creativity. There is a positive association between the social media usage and knowledge sharing. The employees with higher level of social media exploitation not only acquire knowledge through social media but try to share and discuss it with the others too because it will help them deeply understand the information and improve their work life and also in creating new ideas and knowledge (Sigala & Chalkiti, Knowledge management, Social Media and Employee Creativity, 2015). The usage of social media for knowledge sharing purpose increases with the rise in age. And is usually found among top officials. Lower levels are less likely to use social media for knowledge sharing purpose (Gaal, Szabo, Kovacs, & Csepregi, 2015)

(Zaffar & Ghazawneh, 2012) did case study on IBM. *James EK, country manager for former and lotus collaboration solutions* stated that social media gives the access to the relevant information at right time. It also flattens the organization. Social media is a way for prompt and powerful spread of information in an organization.

Social media lowers the barriers for communication. Commitment to the organization and communication climate in an organization are positively related to the knowledge sharing of the employees. And the use of computer-mediated communications positively affects the commitment and communication in the organization. The paper also suggested for distinction between knowledge collecting and donating as the causes for both are not similar e.g. commitment affects donation of knowledge not collection but they are inter-related also (Hooff & Ridder, 2004). (Kwahk & Park, 2016) introduced the new variable i.e. *Tertius Iungens orientation* to be positively related to knowledge sharing activities which positively affects job performance too. *Tertius Iungens* means separation between the two parties who are connected through a third party. It suggested the use of social media in an organization should be promoted for knowledge sharing. The effective use of *Tertius Iungens* facilitates knowledge sharing in an organization. Secondly, they favoured the role of social networks ties through social media an important factor in knowledge sharing and management. Thus, the companies should encourage the use of social media and development of friendly network

ties among the workers. It also found the role of reciprocity norm to be positive on knowledge sharing activities.

(Levy, 2013) suggested that social media benefits an organization in the process of knowledge management to a great extent. It helps in making the sharing of tacit knowledge easier in the organization. The sharing of knowledge from the lower levels to the upper levels become convenient through social media. Collection of information for the work-related purpose becomes much easier by using social media tools. It makes inter-connectivity or communication patterns more transparent in the organization. In large sized organizations too where the business is geographically distributed sharing of knowledge becomes much convenient through various social media tools. Social media builds mutual trusts and facilitates cooperation amongst the members in the organization.

Social media can be adopted using four levels of architecture in the organization step by step and gradually: (0) where there is no use of social media in the organization (1) traditional knowledge sharing tools with some element of social media visibility (2) adding some more functionality services to the use of social media along with the traditional tools (3) for different needs in the business social media tools are implemented without social media concept (4) in this stage full social media is implemented in the organization. This gradual shift to social media will help organizations in implementing full social media tools in the organization without facing much reluctance from the employees to change (Levy, 2013).

(AI Saifi, Dillon, & Mc Queen, 2016) explored the relationship between face to face social networking and knowledge sharing. The study revealed various factors that affect knowledge sharing. One amongst those is multiple communication styles. They talked of various tools like emails and video conferencing in reaching higher levels of knowledge and ultimately sharing it among the employees.

(Hsu, Ju, Yen, & Chang, 2007) studied knowledge sharing behaviour in the virtual communities (engineering, computers, science, humanities, entertainment, business, politics, health, others) in Taiwan, Hong Kong and China. The study found both direct and indirect outcomes of self-efficacy on knowledge sharing in the members of virtual communities. Individuals believe relationships can be improved by sharing knowledge with the other members of the community. The study also favoured positive relationship between personal outcome expectations (rewards) and sharing of knowledge with others. And lastly when the environment of trust is established, knowledge is more likely to be shared with the other members.

(Fauzi, Nya-Ling, Thurasamy, & Ojo, 2018) did study on knowledge sharing in Malaysian higher learning institutes. The study was done on academics working there. The study found that management support and social media use have positive effects on knowledge sharing among employees. After management support, social media is the second most considerable factor in the study that promotes knowledge sharing. When academics know how to use social media, it encourages them more towards knowledge sharing behaviour.

(Majchrzak, Faraj, Kane, & Azad, 2013) discussed how workers at workplace engage in knowledge sharing conversation. They described four affordances of using social media by employees i.e. meta voicing, triggered attending, network informed associating and generative role taking. *Meta voicing* has been defined as a reaction to other people posts, profile or views. *Triggered attending* is remaining uninvolved in generation of any content but participating when asked for giving some specific content. *Network informed associating*

is how employees engage in knowledge conversation through the relational ties. Lastly *generative role taking* is taking active roles in generation and maintaining of productive dialogue among employees. A contribution is made towards effective knowledge sharing conversation at workplace by integrating technology with affordance lens for using social media of an individual.

(Roblek, Bach, Mesko, & Bertoneclj, 2013) indicating knowledge sharing analysed that intangible assets can be transformed to increase turnover, profits and reorganization of manpower in an organization with the use of social media.

(Benbya, Passiante, & Belbaly, 2004) as discussed above gave four phases of knowledge sharing process in the organization which includes knowledge creation, knowledge storage, knowledge distribution and knowledge application. The article also focussed on the role of social media in the process and discussed every stage in this light. As of the *knowledge creation* various tools like communication, applications for sharing information and community creation are required and social media through its various applications and features like email, chat tools, video conferencing and virtual community creation helps in aiding the creation of knowledge. The step of *knowledge storage* is also supported by social media as it has the ability to keep the data saved in the form of archives that can be retrieved any time. In context to *knowledge distribution* social media has several components that supports the distribution of knowledge in the workplace. These components include (a) profiling, which helps in sending the right information to the right person (b) push or pull technology i.e. distributing the information through emails, messaging etc. and the third is (c) publishing- as the sharing of information through social media can be done through HTML, XML or PDF format. Lastly the *knowledge application* or the usage of knowledge is also assisted by social media through integration, process automation such routing or workflows and availability of stored data in the form of archives and making use of it any time.

Prerequisites for successful adoption of social media at workplace for knowledge sharing

(Benbya, Passiante, & Belbaly, 2004) suggested certain ways for successful adoption and implementations of social media at workplace for knowledge sharing purpose. These are

Support of CEO

A strong leadership is very important for implementing knowledge sharing culture in any organization. The management which supports and is committed towards creating a knowledge sharing atmosphere will take initiatives for buying and installing latest technology for information sharing through social media. In the absence of management support the employees will also not actively participate in knowledge management activities of the organization.

Encouragement to the employees for adopting these technologies

Needs and difficulties of the employees need to be analysed. What motivates employees should be understood and they should be encouraged on how these changes in the technology can benefit them. If the employees value knowledge sharing they would share it and if they don't value it they will not share (Vuori & Okkonen, 2012). The employees should be convinced the way customers are convinced for the adoption of latest technologies or social media for sharing knowledge.

Integrating knowledge process with the business processes

There should be linking of knowledge process with the business processes. Knowledge sharing should become part of day to day activity of the business. Employees should be encouraged to actively contribute towards knowledge through social media.

Culture of sharing information

There should be a culture of sharing information in the organization. The existence of such culture is must for implementing or making knowledge sharing compulsory in the organization. In the absence of information sharing culture knowledge sharing will become difficult at workplace.(Vuori & Okkonen, 2012) also supported the existence of information sharing culture for knowledge management. If the culture does not support knowledge sharing what channels are used does not matter.

Learning from past mistakes

A successful organization should understand its mistakes or failures and should take efforts to avoid such failures in future while implementing technologies for social media at workplace.

Non-monetary rewards

With the change of time employees cannot only be encouraged with monetary rewards or incentives. The management should consider non-monetary incentives and contemporary ethics for encouraging their employees towards mandating knowledge sharing and the use of technology (social media) for the same in an organization.

Trust

(Paroutis & Saleh, 2009) discussed another requisite for developing knowledge sharing in an organization i.e. Trust, which can either be benevolence based or competency based. The employees will share through social media if they trust the accuracy, quality and reliability of the information they can get through internet or social media. This is competency-based trust. And if they trust that the information will not be misused or no other person will take the credit of it, it is benevolence-based trust. An organization should ensure trust too for proper implementation of knowledge sharing through social media

Conclusion

For a successful business knowledge sharing is must. There are various barriers for knowledge sharing at individual, organizational and technological level. Management should adopt certain measures to remove these barriers and social media nowadays play an important role in it. The firms need to make their employees social media literate. The climate and culture in an organization should be the one that supports social media usage. The managers should also encourage their subordinates for social media use so that a culture of using social media for knowledge sharing purpose can be developed. The study found many benefits of implementing social media in an organization. Social media must be implemented in the organization for its betterment. For this the involvement of top management is necessary. As it is on the management to frame policies and guidelines on the important issues. Adopting social media for knowledge sharing purpose also calls for technological changes in the working system of the organization. So, there is also need for hiring technological staff for

the same. Overall the study found social media at workplace to be very germane for knowledge sharing and an integrated growth of a business.

References

- Ahmed, Y. A., Ahmad, M. N., Ahmad, N., & Zakaria, N. H. (2018). Social Media For Knowledge Sharing: A Systematic Literature Review. *Telematics and Informatics*. doi:doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2018.01.015
- AI Saifi, A. S., Dillon, S., & Mc Queen, R. J. (2016). The Relationship between Face to Face Social Networks and Knowledge Sharing: An Exploratory Study of Manufacturing Firms. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 20(2). doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JKM-07-2015-0251
- Akram, T., Lei, S., Haider, M. J., Hussain, S. T., & Puig, L. C. (2017). The effect of organizational justice on knowledge sharing: Empirical evidence from the Chinese telecommunications sector. *Journal of Innovation and Knowledge*, 2(3), 97-182. doi:10.1016/j.jik.2016.09.002
- Benbya, H., Passiante, G., & Belbaly, N. A. (2004). Corporate Portal: a tool for knowledge management synchronization. *International Journal of Information Management*, 24, 201-220.
- Bharati, P., Zhang, W., & Chaudhary, A. (2015). Better Knowledge with Social media? Exploring the roles of social capital and organizational knowledge Management. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 19(3), 456-475.
- Boyd, D., & Ellison, N. (2008). social networking sites:Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of computer- mediated communications*, 13, 210-230.
- Chow, W. S., & Chan, L. S. (2008). Social network, social trust and shared goals in organizational knowledge sharing. *Information & Management*, 45, 458-465.
- Dawley, L. (2009). Social network knowledge construction: emerging virtual pedagogy. *On the Horizon*, 17(2), 109-121.
- Edosomwan, S., Prakasan, S. K., Kouame, D., Watson, J., & Seymour, T. (2011). The History of Social Media and its Impact on Business. *The Journal of Applied Management and Entrepreneurship*, 16(3), 79-91.
- El Quirdi, A., El Quirdi, M., segers, J., & Henderickx, E. (2015). Employees use os social medi technologies: A methodological and thematic review. *Behaviour and Information Technology*.
- Ellison, N. B., Gibbs, J. L., & Weber, M. S. (2015). The use of enterprise social network sites for knowledge sharing in Distributed Organizations: The role of Organizational Affordances. *American Behavioural Scientists*, 59(1), 103-123. doi:10.1177/0002764214540510

- Fauzi, M. A., Nya-Ling, C. T., Thurasamy, R., & Ojo, A. O. (2018). An Integrative Model of Knowledge Sharing in Malaysian Higher Learning Institute. *Kebernetes*. doi:<http://doi.org/10.1108/K-10-2017-0388>
- Fuchs, C. (2014). *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*. Sage.
- Gaal, Z., Szabo, L., Kovacs, N. O., & Csepregi, A. (2015). Exploring the Role of Social Media in Knowledge Sharing. *The Electronic Journal of Knowledge Management*, 13(3), 185-197.
- Hooff, B. v., & Ridder, J. (2004). Knowledge sharing in context: the influence of organizational commitment, communication climate and CMC use on knowledge sharing. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 8(6), 117-130.
- Hsu, M. H., Ju, L. T., Yen, C.-H., & Chang, C.-M. (2007). Knowledge Sharing Behaviour in Virtual Communities: The Relationship between Trust, Self-Efficacy, and Outcome Expectations. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 153-169. doi:[doi:10.1016/j.ijhcs.2006.09.003](http://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2006.09.003)
- Kaplan, A. M., & Haenlein, M. (2010). Users of the World, Unite! The Challenges and Opportunities of Social Media. *Business Horizons*, 53, 59-68.
- Kwahk, K.-Y., & Park, D.-H. (2016). The effects of network sharing on knowledge-sharing activities and job performance in enterprise social media environments. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 55, 826-839.
- Levy, M. (2013). Stairways to heaven: implementing social media in organizations. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 17(5), 741-754.
- Majchrzak, A., Faraj, S., Kane, G., & Azad, B. (2013). The contradictory influence of social media Affordances on online Communal knowledge sharing. *Journal of computer mediated communication*, 19, 38-55.
- Matzler, K., Renzl, B., Muller, J., Herting, S., & Mooradian, T. (2008). Personality traits and knowledge sharing. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 29, 301-313.
- Nielson, P., & Razmerita, L. (2014). Motivation and Knowledge Sharing through Social Media within Danish Organizations. *IFIP International Federation For Information Processing* (pp. 197-213). Denmark: Research Gate.
- Panahi, S., Watson, J., & Partridge, H. (2012). Social Media and Tacit Knowledge Sharing: Developing a Conceptual Model. *World Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Technology, (WASET), Paris, France*, 1095-1102. Retrieved from Queensland UNiversity of Technology.
- Paroutis, S., & Saleh, A. A. (2009). Determinants of Knowledge sharing using web 2.0 technologies. *Journal of Knowledge management*, 13(4), 52-63.
- Razak, N. A., Pangil, F., Md Zin, M., Azlina, N., Yunus, M., & Asnawi, N. H. (2016). Theories of Knowledge Sharing Behaviour in Business Strategy. *Procedia Economics and Finance*, 37, 545-553.

- Riege, A. (2005). Three-Dozen knowledge-sharing barriers managers must consider. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, 9(3), 18-35.
- Roblek, V., Bach, M. P., Mesko, M., & Bertoncelj, A. (2013). The impact of social media to value added in knowledge based industries. *Kybernetes*, 42(4), 554-568.
- Sigala, M., & Chalkiti, K. (2015). Knowledge management, Social Media and Employee Creativity. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 45, 44-58.
- Vuori, V., & Okkonen, J. (2012). Knowledge sharing motivational factors of using an intra-organizational social media platform. *Journal of Knowledge management*, 16(4), 592-603.
- Zaffar, F. O., & Ghazawneh, A. (2012). Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration through Social Media- The Case of IBM. *Mediterranean Conference on Information Systems*.28. AIS Electronic Library.