Enterprise Social Media Reputation – The Risk of Providing and Seeking Knowledge through Different Status Levels

Masterarbeit

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1   Introduction

Since years, organizations become increasingly distributed. Accompanied by this movement is the challenge to exchange knowledge within the workforce. Therefore, knowledge management systems (KMS) are introduced in oganizations to support internal knowledge flows (Ellison et al., 2015; Fulk & Yuan, 2013). Traditionally, these KMS are associated with technologies as exemplified decision support and expert localisation systems or intranets (Fulk & Yuan, 2013). However, researchers recently discover an upcoming trend in knowledge management. Following the opinion of scientists, social media is a novel buzzword in knowledge research (Aboelmaged, 2018). Literature reviews prove the correctness of this statement. Exemplified, a present literature analysis of social media demonstrates that 67.5% of the identified papers discuss the topic in the context of knowledge sharing and communication (Högberg, 2018). Beside the examination of social media in the literature, practitioners are aware of it too (Mäntymäk & Riemer, 2016). To some extent, the before mentioned research accounts for latter development. Moreover, the popularity of social network applications in the publicity is responsible as well. Due to diverse functions to connect with individuals across time and space, public social networks (PSN) have become an immanent component of social interaction (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Above, the online virtual networks allow users to present themselfe and receive a far-reaching attention by others (Brzozowski et al., 2009). These arguments generate the degree of esteem of PSN that is demonstrated by the multiplicity of diverse content users that contribute to sites as Facebook, Instagram or YouTube on a daily basis (Claussen et al., 2013; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Susarla et al., 2011). Given this high attention on virtual networks in the public sphere, companies initiate their imitation by integrating these social technologies in the business context (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Brzozowski et al., 2009; Turban et al., 2011). Companies that adopt the social media technologies, especially ESN as in-house virtual platforms, are for instance Microsoft and IBM (Mäntymäk & Riemer, 2014; Van Osch et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2010). Within the group of companies that introduce social media, numerous of these adopters utilize the social applications to foster the internal knowledge exchange activities (Majchrzak et al., 2013). Thus, existing work indicates that ESN have a share in the utilization of established as well as the creation of new knowledge (Riemer & Scifleet, 2012), reduce the stickiness of knowledge (Leonardi & Meyer, 2015) and increase the precision of employees metaknowledge comprising of who knows what and who knows whom (Leonardi, 2015). In-line with the previous demonstration, the motivation of the thesis is to concentrate on the knowledge providing

and knowledge seeking behaviour especially in the context of ESN for several reasons. As illustrated above, these social applications recently gain a high popularity in the workplace and make a contribution to the knowledge management of organizations (Fulk & Yuan, 2013; Turban et al., 2011). Additionally, examining knowledge management incorporates to study interactions and connections between individuals. This fundamental idea is also covered by the networking perspective inherent in ESN (Fulk & Yuan, 2013). Particularly in knowledge exchange activities, the social interaction between people is an important component. Through having contact with others, individuals develop a sentiment of their counterpart. They assess if they are willing to engage in knowledge providing or knowledge seeking behaviour with the other party (Lucas, 2005; Lucas & Ogilvie, 2006). In that sense, the socially formed perceptions of an individuals character, also refered to as reputation, are cruical (Zinko et al., 2012). However, in most of todays distributed organizations, employees that frequently work together sometimes never met in reality (Emelo, 2012). While ESN pick up especially this point of allowing communication and collaboration between colleagues that are geographically distributed (Leonardi et al., 2013), the question remains of how to evaluate other ESN users only through virtual interaction. This issue can be solved with a virtual reputation system that helps users to assess other parties (Bush & Tiwana, 2005; Emelo, 2012). While most of the research concentrates on the arrangement of those virtual systems and on measures and methods used to calculate users reputation (De Alfaro et al., 2011; Jacovi et al., 2014), less to none research is done in the area of observing others virtual reputation in an ESN as a motivation to engage in knowledge exchange activities. To fill this research gap the thesis at hand considers a reputation as a valuable individual asset people want to protect. Therefore, the following research question (RQ) is picked out as a central theme.

RQ: How does the risk of reputation loss harm the knowledge exchange in an ESN platform?

To contribute to the growing reseach stream of enterprise social media (ESM) the thesis examines especially the status differences in ESN reputation and their effect on knowledge exchange behaviour. In detail, this paper takes a look at varying reputation levels of knowledge provider and knowledge seeker and how the perceived risk of loosing ones reputation is connected to exchanging knowledge.

To answer the RQ, the composition of the thesis possesses the following structure depicted by figure 1. After the illustration of the relevance and motivation to dicsuss the above introduced

topic, the second chapter deals with related research to establish a theoretical background of ESN, knowledge in organizations as well as personal reputation. Further, chapter three highlights the research methodologies that are used to assess the RQ. Here, the procedure of the literature analysis is demonstrated that helps the author to get an overview of the already conducted research in the mentioned field. Additionally, the following part of the methodology presents the reasons for conducting a quantitative research using PLS-SEM. Besides, PLS-SEM will be briefly discussed. Chapter four examines the results of the previous literature review to derive the research models and hypotheses. Moreover, to test this hypotheses, chapter five gives an overview about the content and arrangement of the conducted survey and deals with analyzing and testing the research models. Afterwards, the results of the study are critically discussed. Before ending with a conclusion, implications for practice are deduced and future research possibilitys presented.

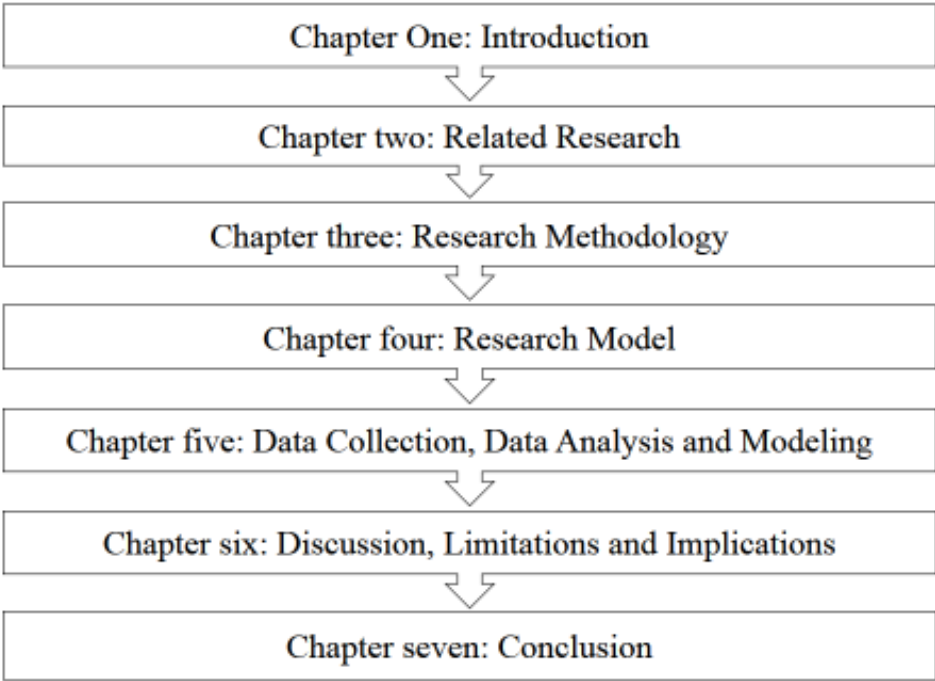| Chapter One: Introduction |
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| Chapter two: Related Research |
| Chapter three: Research Methodology |
| Chapter four: Research Model |
| Chapter five: Data Collection, Data Analysis and Modeling |
| Chapter six: Discussion, Limitations and Implications |
| Chapter seven: Conclusion |

Figure 1: Research Structure, own presentation

benefits of introducing an ESN can only be reached if employees contribute to the virtual platform (Cheng & Vassileva, 2005). Therefore, the present study has an input to the research stream that helps practitioners to decode the causes of contributions to the ESN. Although this thesis can notverify that users are more willing to provide and seek knowledge within their own reputation status, the importance of reputation systems on vitual networks has to be recognized. The thesis recommend ESN desingers and IT managers to further employ reputation systems on these vitual networks and rate contibutions depending on their quality (Kügler et al., 2015). The reason is that the results make clear that knowledge providers of a high reputation are engaged in knowledge exchange activities with knowledge seekers possessing a high reputation too. In fact, a knowledge exchange between users of a high reputation is proposed to be characterized as a high quality exchange (Beck et al., 2014). This could be of importance for practitioners to enhance the overall quality of transferred knowledge on the ESN and to increase the significance of ESN as a part of the organizations knowledge management activities. However, organizations have to weight the benefits and disadvantages of different reputation systems (Kügler et al., 2015). As this paper mentioned before, using a point based reputation system is susceptible to activities defined as gaming the system (Farzan et al., 2008a, 2008b). Above, the study illustrates in general that practitioners should focus on creating an athmosphere on the ESN that users perceive as favourable. This helps to achive a positive attitude towards using the ESN for knowledge exchange behaviours. Finally, practitioners have to understan that ESN users are aware of privacy related issues. Therefore, arrangements to protect the own privacy should be considered to reduce the overall risk of using ESN. Here, it is necessary to illustrate the benefits of using an ESN to the users that outweight the risks.

7   Conclusion

The thesis contributes to several research streams. First, the paper concentrates on the subject of knowledge management in organizations and especially on exchanging knowledge between different parties, because knowledge is one of the most important ressources of firms to stay competitive (Grant, 1996). Due to its recently emerging nature (Leonardi et al., 2013), ESN as a subcategory of ESM are picked up to integrate the knowledge management topic in. To examine the knowledge providing and seeking behaviour through different status levels on these virtual platforms, parts of the literature stream of information privacy and privacy concerns, risk management and personal reputation are combined and investigated in proposed research

models. Testing and analyzing these research models by using PLS-SEM leads to several conclusions. In fact, the ESN reputation of employees is an important topic to be considered when taking a look at the knowledge providing and seeking behaviour. However, given that only some of the hypotheses are supported, both behaviours should be studied further by applying different research methods as illustrated before. Opposed to the assumed hypotheses, the risk of losing the own ESN reputation had only a minor extend when studying the knowledge exchange on ESN. In contrast, the standard constucts of TPB could be verified in the context of knowledge exchange on virtual platforms.