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An Exploration of the Effects of Enterprise Social Media Use for Classroom Teams

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the adoption of Microsoft Teams, a group-based Enterprise Social Media (ESM) tool, in the context of a hybrid Information Technology Management undergraduate course from a large midwestern university. With the primary goal of providing insights into the use and design of tools for group-based educational settings, we constructed a model to reflect our expectations that core ESM affordances would enhance students' perceptions of Microsoft Teams' functionality and efficiency, which in turn would increase both students' perceptions of group productivity and students' actual usage of Microsoft Teams for communication purposes. In our model we used three core ESM affordances from Treem and Leonardi (2013), namely editability (i.e., information can be created and/or edited after creation, usually in a collaborative fashion), persistence (i.e., information is stored permanently), and visibility (i.e., information is visible to other users).

Analysis of quantitative (surveys, server-side; N=62) and qualitative (interviews; N=7) data led to intriguing results. It seems that although students considered that editability, persistency, and visibility affordances within Microsoft Teams were convenient functions of this ESM, problems when working collaboratively (such as connectivity, formatting, and searching glitches) might have prevented considerations of this ESM as fast and user-friendly (i.e., efficient). Moreover, although perceived functionality and efficiency were positively connected to group productivity, hidden/non-intuitive communication features within this ESM might help explain the surprising negative connection between efficiency and usage of this ESM for the purpose of group communication. Another explanation is that, given the plethora of competing tools specifically designed to afford seamless/optimal team communication, students preferred to use more familiar tools or tools perceived as more efficient for group communication than Microsoft Teams, a finding consistent with findings in organizational settings (Van Osch, Steinfield, and Balogh, 2015).

Beyond theoretical contributions related to the impact that ESM affordances have on users' interaction perceptions, and the impact of users' interaction perceptions on team and system outcomes, from a strategic and practical point of view, our findings revealed several challenges for the

use of Microsoft Teams (and perhaps ESM at large) in educational settings: 1) As the demand for online education grows, collaborative tools such as Microsoft Teams should strive to provide seamless experiences for multiple-user access to files and messages; 2) Microsoft Teams should improve its visual design in order to increase ease of use, user familiarity, and intuitiveness; 3) Microsoft Teams appears to have a high-learning curve, partially related to the fact that some features are hidden or take extra steps/clicks to be accessed, thus undermining their use; 4) Team communication is a complex topic which should be further studied because, given the choice, students will fall upon familiar tools therefore undermining the full potential for team collaboration through the ESM.

We expect that this paper can provide insights for educators faced with the choice for an ESM tool best-suited for group-based classroom settings, as well as designers interested in adapting ESMs to educational contexts, which is a promising avenue for market expansion.

Keywords

Enterprise social media, educational settings, group-based learning, mixed-methods, affordances

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