



SOCIALNESS IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY: SUPPORTING MEANINGFUL WORK THROUGH ENTERPRISE SOCIAL MEDIA

About the project

Humans are inherently social beings and maintaining social relationships, whether personally or professionally, has emotional, cognitive, and instrumental benefits. In workplace settings, increasing numbers of employees are members of networks on enterprise social media (ESM). Although ESM are designed to be "social," little is known about if and how these technologies can be supportive of meaningful social interactions, like those occurring in physical settings. In recent years, researchers in information systems (IS) have begun to explore the intricacies of ESM and the social ties within them; however, without a fundamental understanding of socialness, its importance in the workplace, and the role that technology – such as ESM – can play in enhancing workplace socialness, such empirical efforts are myopic. Hence, to guide future empirical research and provide practical suggestions to organizations, we developed a holistic review of socialness in the past decade (2010-2020), to understand the meaning and the value of socialness in the workplace and digital settings and the role ESM and other technologies play in supporting workplace socialness.

Preliminary findings

- We define socialness as the intrinsic and spontaneous human willingness to affiliate and connect with others in order to build harmonious relationships. In the workplace, socialness has three key components: work-related interactions, informal communication and the provision of emotional support.
- Socialness increases the number of social interactions, thus motivating employees to share resources reciprocally and develop trust in one another. Socialness also acts as a channel for information and resources and facilitates knowledge sharing. Moreover, socialness helps employees to improve efficiency and effectiveness, and alleviates pressures that would undermine their performance. Socialness also provides employees with a feeling of being connected with others and belonging to a community.
- ESM break geographical and temporal boundaries among employees and thus facilitate the flow of information and knowledge; however, they can also lead to information overload and groupthink. Meanwhile, ESM can help foster and reinforce community identity and increase attachment to the organization, but they can also induce psychological burdens, distractions and the infringement of privacy.

Policy implications

- From a managerial perspective, organizations should structure a supportive, inclusive and hospitable social environment via social gatherings, team-building exercises and private activities. Organizations should also recognize the importance and benefits of technology-enabled socialness, lay down clear policies and norms to foster meaningful socialness experiences, and offer training and guidance to better leverage ESM for supporting socialness.
- Designers and managers of ESM should customize the platforms based on the needs of organizations and their employees and eliminate unnecessary features to achieve better usability while alleviating information overload. The use of recommendation algorithms can be helpful if these are focused on balancing diverse individuals' interests and goals as well as diversity of information. Moreover, individual customizations should be enabled to allow users to adjust these platforms to their own needs and manage the level of privacy individually desired.

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