

An overview of Web 2.0 social capital: a cross-cultural approach

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Abstract This is an introductory paper for this Special Issue on Web 2.0 Social Capital. We present a general discussion of motivations for and barriers to applying an Enterprise 2.0 approach. Focus then shifts to the specific fields of *knowledge sharing* and *e-commerce*. The article continues with an examination of social capital 2.0 issues. Discussion centers on the employee's perspective of using Web 2.0 applications and on the adoption of corporate Web 2.0 tools for collaboration. Finally, the paper presents a brief background for each of the topics covered in the five articles selected for this special issue on Web 2.0 social capital.

Keywords Service · Social capital · Web 2.0

The term *Web 2.0* was officially coined by O'Reilly Media in 2004 (O'Reilly 2005). It refers to a perceived second generation of community-driven web services such as social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and the like. These services facilitate a more socially connected form of the web, whereby everyone is able to communicate, participate, collaborate, add to, and edit the information contained within. As a result of more efficient means of communication such as weblogs (Paroutis and Saleh 2009), social networks (Boyd and Ellison 2007), social bookmarking sites (Golder and Huberman 2006), and wikis (Spinellis and Louridas 2008), companies

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can no longer shield themselves from stakeholder involvement. The only question is whether they are willing to actively shape their interactions with stakeholder groups or rather be dragged along by the current wave of intensive Web 2.0 participation (Fieseler and Fleck 2013). *Enterprise 2.0* is defined as the use of Web 2.0 platforms to achieve higher-level enterprise and process-oriented interconnectivity that reaches beyond departmental silos and organizational boundaries (with external partners and peers). *Enterprise 2.0* can provide several benefits for organizations.

Organizations deal with different sources of value and types of capital. These types of capital are financial, human, and social capital, the latter referring to relations with colleagues, acquaintances, or contacts. Social capital can provide opportunities to access financial and human resources. Broadly, social capital refers to harnessing social relations to generate productive results. Social relations are valuable resources because they facilitate economic activity, improve innovation, and allow organizations to become more efficient and access privileged business opportunities (Burt 1992; Fornoni et al. 2012).

The new Web 2.0 environments exert an impact on all areas of an organization, including market orientation and innovation (Palacios et al. 2013). Social networks and other Web 2.0 environments allow organizations to develop new strategies to generate and optimize social capital in today's hyper-connected world, where relationship paradigms are continuously changing. Nevertheless, the advent of *social capital 2.0* does not only provide organizations with new opportunities to generate value but also forces enterprises to face new challenges such as cultural issues. As revealed in cultural comparison studies of human-computer interaction, it is believed that cultural differences profoundly affect the way organizations and their stakeholders interact through Web 2.0 tools (Ji et al. 2010). Unfortunately, differences in how firms in disparate cultures employ Web 2.0 ICT communication tools, such as social networks, have not been systematically explored. The last two papers in this special issue make a relevant contribution to filling this gap.

Web 2.0 technologies, applications, and business models are now sparking user participation and fostering group communication in both personal and professional spheres. The five papers included in this special issue expound the potential of *social capital 2.0*, while presenting an overview of the main management challenges arising from the implementation of an Enterprise 2.0 approach.

1 Contents of this special issue

As discussed by Trimi and Galanxhi in the first paper of this special issue, regardless of their low cost, ease of use, and broad range of applications, Enterprise 2.0 has yet to be fully embraced by organizations. The authors explored the reasons why organizations adopt Enterprise 2.0 and discovered some of the critical success factors for Enterprise 2.0 adoption in organizations. To achieve their research aims, the authors examined case studies of two large international firms, one of which is for-profit and the other non-profit. Trimi and Galanxhi found that within both organizations there is an overall belief in the positive impact of Enterprise 2.0 usage on communication, collaboration, community building, employee engagement,

knowledge management, and organizational activities and outcomes in general. Clear differences did, however, emerge between the two firms. For instance, the for-profit organization did not simply embrace the *potential* benefits of Enterprise 2.0. Instead, it actively used these tools internally and externally. Nevertheless, Enterprise 2.0 was seen as a way of complementing rather than replacing face-to-face meetings, and organizational members voiced some effectiveness, efficiency and security concerns over the use of these tools. In both organizations, managers were consistently more skeptical than employees in Enterprise 2.0 benefits. By not using Enterprise 2.0 tools, managers failed to grasp the full benefits of Enterprise 2.0 and were unable to lead by example to inspire their employees to use these tools. Lack of management support seemed to be a major obstacle to a wider adoption and use of Enterprise 2.0. Large organization size also appeared to be an obstacle, perhaps because it increased difficulties in raising awareness of the tools and their benefits, and hampered the provision of guidance and training. Finally, Enterprise 2.0 is cross-departmental, -project and -country, and its voluntary nature appeared to be an issue because the lack of ownership by a specific department may create managerial issues.

The paper entitled “*Determinants of the use of Web 2.0 technologies for knowledge sharing in SMEs*” by Soto-Acosta, Perez-Gonzalez and Popa analyzes the actual use of Web 2.0 technologies for knowledge management in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Previous research has shown that businesses have extensively adopted Internet technologies and that actual usage has an important link to business value. This link is sometimes missing in businesses, however, especially in SMEs. In addition, although existing research has expanded our knowledge in this area, little is known about the determinants of Web 2.0 use for specific business processes such as knowledge sharing. Furthermore, the literature has scarcely addressed how these processes may contribute to business value. This paper thus extends previous studies on the use of Internet technologies and knowledge management by analyzing factors affecting Web 2.0 technologies for knowledge sharing in SMEs. More specifically, drawing upon the technology–organization–environment (TOE) framework, the authors developed a model to examine how distinct contextual factors influence the use of Web 2.0 technologies for knowledge sharing. Hypotheses were tested using structural equation modeling (SEM) on a large sample of Spanish SMEs from different industries. The paper’s results suggest that IT expertise and commitment-based human resources practices positively affect the use of Web 2.0 technologies for knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing was in fact found to be the strongest factor in the proposed model. In contrast, a negative relationship was found between competition and the use of Web 2.0 technologies for knowledge sharing. As a consequence, the authors concluded that knowledge sharing through Web 2.0 technologies in SMEs arises from internal organizational and technological resources rather than from external pressure.

The article “*Web 2.0, social capital and work performance in service companies: the employees’ view*” presented by Tormo-Carbó, Seguí-Mas, and Oltra explored the perspectives of employees in Spanish service companies on using Web 2.0 applications for social capital and work-related purposes. The research context is the

current online networking revolution, which reinforces the role of social capital as a key intangible asset embedded in Web 2.0 tools. The authors asserted that synergies between workplace-related Web 2.0 networks and social capital can significantly enhance business value creation. In other words, maintaining better relationships between employees and customers helps optimize customer knowledge through improved organizational social capital. The authors found that employees of Spanish service firms were reasonably familiar with Web 2.0 networks and considered them quite useful in potentially enhancing an organization's social capital. Regarding the most relevant perceived advantages of Web 2.0 applications, the authors stressed the benefits for career improvement, finding solutions to work-related problems, and sharing work-related information. These insightful results imply a prioritization of individuals' social capital over firms' social capital, which poses a key challenge for Spanish service companies. The authors' findings also point to significant links between the work focus of Web 2.0 tools and the value added by their expected benefits. This is consistent with better educated and more senior employees' expectations of receiving higher-value benefits from work-related Web 2.0 applications. This study's results also imply that, although better educated people prefer tools related to their professional interests, social networking intensity seems to be independent of job and education levels. This is in fact consistent with general social trends. Results confirm that younger individuals make greater use of different network types, especially social networks and video/media sharing applications. This finding is also consistent with global trends. All in all, this thought-provoking study contributes to cutting-edge research on the use of Web 2.0 networks in the workplace, pinpointing relevant challenges for Spanish service companies and suggesting stimulating pathways for further research.

Electronic commerce is one of the most popular services on the Internet and one of the most important drivers of economic growth for businesses. While some online services enjoy great success, however, others struggle to succeed in virtual markets. Agudo-Peregrina, Pascual-Miguel, and Chaparro-Peláez addressed this issue in their article entitled "*It's never the same: the role of homogeneity in online services*". The authors explored the relations and differences between purchase intention, perceived risk, and actual purchase behavior across different services according to their degree of heterogeneity. Starting from an observation of sales figures of different services, the authors investigated the features that differentiate services. After an analysis of the main variables used to classify services, they found that the degree of heterogeneity is a differential characteristic of online services. The authors examined 15 online services, including Web 2.0 services, based on their degree of heterogeneity. They then analyzed their online performance by comparing levels of perceived risk, purchase intention, and actual purchase behavior. After analyzing data from surveys to online consumers, the authors concluded that there are significant differences in behavior depending on the degree of homogeneity of online services, with higher purchase intention, higher actual purchase behavior, and lower perceived risk in homogeneous services. The authors claimed that the findings of their study should encourage shop managers to ensure that their services achieve the highest possible degree of homogeneity. According to the authors, this improves market performance, especially in Web 2.0 services. Even in highly homogeneous

Web 2.0 services, consumers' experiences may be unique, which hinders their ability to differentiate between the content and service provided, and thus affects their perception of homogeneity.

Web 2.0 technologies, such as blogs and wikis, were designed with a strong social component in mind. They facilitate low-cost implementation of collaboration tools, which is one of the reasons why they have been rapidly embraced by all kinds of organizations in recent years. In their article "*How socially derived characteristics of technology shape the adoption of corporate Web 2.0 tools for collaboration*", Iglesias-Pradas, Hernández-García, and Fernández-Cardador examined the acceptance of a specific type of Web 2.0 tools, namely corporate blogs, for collaborative purposes and knowledge sharing in organizations. In their paper, the authors focused on the role of technology's socially derived characteristics in the adoption process. Prior literature on the acceptance of information systems and its use in organizations has generally considered only the relevance of technological factors. Despite this, the authors argued that the study of corporate blog adoption should take into account these often-neglected socially derived characteristics as a way of reducing employees' resistance to use, especially in pre-implementation stages. They proposed a TAM-based framework with three socially derived characteristics (i.e., perceived compatibility, social presence, and group supportability) as antecedents of the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of the system. They then validated the framework with a survey to employees of a company in the early stages of corporate blog deployment for collaboration purposes. Results from their analysis suggest that social presence has a pivotal role in the acceptance and use of corporate blogs, and that company-wide and individual values must be aligned for new collaborative systems to succeed. The authors also found that there is no employee perception that corporate blogs may be currently used as a tool for real-time collaboration.

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