

Chapter 6

Use of Social Media for Knowledge Sharing by Instructors in a Higher Education Institution: An Exploratory Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Against the backdrop that universities are required to generate and disseminate relevant and applicable knowledge for the general good, and with the understanding that social media can be an effective vehicle for such knowledge sharing practices, this study explored the use of social media for knowledge sharing by academics at a university college in Ghana. The study thus examined how instructors use social media for sharing academic knowledge, the factors that promote such knowledge sharing practices, and the barriers to effective knowledge sharing in the academic environment. 47 instructors participated by completing an online questionnaire, whilst 7 participated in focus group discussions. Findings reveal a regular, though not daily, use of social media platforms for academic knowledge sharing. Personal, technological and institutional factors were determined to be contributing in fostering as well as hindering such activities. Implications of these findings as well as suggestions for future research are accordingly discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The Oxford English Dictionary defines knowledge as “facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject” (Oxforddictionaries.com, 2016). For an individual or organisation, knowledge represents the sum of all this theoretical and practical understanding of several subject areas, and residing in the intelligence and competence of the said individual, or in the case of an organisation, all individuals within the organisation. Knowledge also provides a framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information (Davenport & Prusak, 2000). In the current information age, knowledge, better known as intellectual capital, is increasingly being recognized as a greater contributor to organizational wealth (Hislop, 2013), and applying knowledge-based resources is at the heart of competitive advantage for enterprises (Jasimuddin & Zhang, 2014).

Being such a very critical resource, individuals and organisations need to appropriately manage knowledge so that the right knowledge will always be available to the right people at the right time and place etc. The processes of knowledge acquisition, creation, refinement, storage, transfer, sharing, and utilization that are used to get the most out of an individual’s or organization’s knowledge are collectively referred to as Knowledge Management, a discipline which has, in recent times, been a primary focus of attention for enterprises interested in the innovative development and maintenance of competitive advantages (Hakami, et al., 2014; King, 2009).

One crucial component of knowledge management is knowledge sharing - a process where knowledge is reciprocally shared between individuals within a group, negotiated and refined until it becomes common knowledge to the group (Yang, 2004). This sharing process often consists of collecting, organizing and conversing knowledge from one to another (Van-den-Hooff & De-Ridder, 2004). Indeed, knowledge management practitioners assert that, to get the most value from one’s intellectual assets, knowledge must be shared and serve as the foundation for collaboration. This is so because, when managed properly, knowledge sharing can greatly improve work-quality and decision- making skills, problem-solving efficiency as well as competency that will benefit individuals and the organization at large (Syed-Ihksan & Rowland, 2004; Yang, 2007). Knowledge sharing is therefore emerging as a key topic of interest in many fields including innovation management, technology transfer, strategic management etc. (Cummings, 2003).

It must however be emphasized that knowledge can be classified broadly as either explicit or tacit (Miller, 1998). Explicit knowledge consists of facts, rules, relationships and policies that can be codified on paper or electronic form. This

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