

Chapter 10

How Social Factors Influence Implicit Knowledge Construction on the Internet

Albena Antonova
Sofia University, Bulgaria

ABSTRACT

The influence of Internet on knowledge acquisition increases as it became the primary source of reference, especially for young generations. Therefore, it is important to understand how social factors and Internet influences not only explicit but also implicit knowledge construction. Several theories explain the impact of the social groups on the knowledge formation as Social Cognitive Theory of Bandura and Lay Epistemic Theory of Kruglanski. Thus, the authors propose an analysis of the implicit knowledge construction processes through the theoretical overview of Internet communication. More specifically, they discuss how the mechanisms of Internet increase the social and group impact on the implicit knowledge processes.

INTRODUCTION

Information technologies and Internet changed substantially the attitude toward knowledge and knowing as complex psychological and social processes. During the last decades, Internet and information technologies profoundly transformed the way people conceptualize what is knowledge and how to perceive its value. A lot of information and data can be freely found on Internet and the search engines display a large number of answers on any specific question. Improved

access to academic sources and online libraries, large availability to platforms of researchers and universities, and even specific “knowledge marketplaces” (as for example: Innocentive.com), bring scientific knowledge closer to the wider audiences. This creates an attitude of expectation that knowledge is automatically and largely available “on demand”. While these expectations are evident for explicit knowledge, we still don’t know how Internet influences implicit and unconscious knowledge construction. In literature, scholars define *explicit knowledge* as a fact, rationally proved

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and displayed in documents and references. On the other hand the *implicit knowledge* is linked to unconscious thinking, to rumors, impressions, attitudes and emotions.

As technology barriers have been slowly removed, Internet nowadays provides many new forms of synchronous and asynchronous communication that are publicly available and free. With exploding social technologies and web 2.0 instruments, everybody can easily express and create content on Internet, that can reach millions of people for few seconds. In that way, Internet differs substantially from other media as television, radio and print, allowing two-way communication, networking and debate. Thus not only everybody can become a content provider and express his or her views, but in the same time he or she has access to global communities. Therefore, in these new technology realms, it becomes increasingly easy to influence thinking of larger social groups. Even, it is possible “fake” profiles to influence substantial social debates and to have impact on considerable social processes of knowledge construction.

The research problem that we will investigate in this chapter is to specify the mechanisms through which Internet can influence individual implicit knowledge construction. As Internet become more popular as even before, it is important to identify the mechanisms of these technologies to affect implicit knowledge. What is the impact of social groups and how they influence the implicit knowledge construction? More specifically, we will focus on investigating how social factors influence the process of *knowledge justification* that is one of the most substantial factors for knowledge creation.

It is admitted that the process of knowledge creation is essentially social and symbolic in nature. The social cognition includes shared language, code and narratives, shared representations, interpretations and systems of meaning among parties. Moreover, as stated in Chua (2002), the process of knowledge creation is largely influenced by social

processes. Referring to the SECI model of Nonaka et Takeuchi (1994), Chua (2002) emphasizes that three of the four phases of knowledge construction consist of social mechanisms: socialization, externalization and combination. This clearly shows that the process of knowledge conversion involves different social interactions. But how these processes are influenced by Internet?

Our specific interest is focused on Internet as this is universal platform, facilitating and enabling social interactions. Thus Internet in the context of this research will be more widely understood as a global infrastructure and platform for social networking, including web 2.0 facilities and social technologies such as blogs, wikis, forums, social network sites, bookmarks, social sharing of multimedia, social references, tagging and others. We will not focus specifically on the multiple functionalities of Internet as cloud computing service provider (as SaaS, PaaS, IaaS), neither its capacity for groupware, voice over IP, internet television and radio as well as many others. The interest of the topic is motivated as well by the anticipated new technology wave of “Internet of everything”. In this context, researchers expect fast adoption of new generations of Internet technologies, consisting of more devices, services and interconnected systems including people and sophisticated ubiquitous technologies as Internet of things, intelligent robots and artificial intelligence systems. Such a step will change even further people’s communication and collaboration habits, largely influencing the knowledge construction processes. Thus the present analysis will open new perspectives for discussing how new technologies influence the implicit knowledge construction.

Theoretical Background

Knowledge is traditionally defined as “justified true belief”¹. Although in traditional epistemology, philosophers identified an exclusion (the Gettier case), some recent studies (Starmans & Friedman, 2012) prove that even in Gettier situation, people

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