

Incentive-Based Motivation to Network with Coworkers: Strengthening Professional Networks via Online Social Networks

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Abstract : The last decade has witnessed more people than ever before using social media and broadening their social circles. Social media users connect not only with their friends but also with professional acquaintances, primarily coworkers, and clients; personal and professional social circles are mixed within the same social media platform. Considering the positive aspect of social media in facilitating communication and mutual understanding between individuals, we infer that social media interactions with co-workers could indeed benefit one's professional life. However, given privacy issues, sharing all personal details with one's co-workers is not necessarily the best practice. Should one connect with coworkers via social media? Will social media connections with coworkers eventually benefit one's long-term career? Will the benefit differ across cultures? To answer, this study examines how social media can contribute to organizational communication by tracing the foundation of user motivation based on social capital theory, leader-member exchange (LMX) theory and expectancy theory of motivation. Although social media was originally designed for personal communication, users have shown intentions to extend social media use for professional communication, especially when the proper incentive is expected. To articulate the user motivation and the mechanism of the incentive expectation scheme, this study applies those three theories and identify six antecedents and three moderators of social media use motivation including social network flaunt, shared interest, perceived social inclusion. It also hypothesizes that the moderating effects of those constructs would significantly differ based on the relationship hierarchy among the workers. To validate, this study conducted a survey of 329 active social media users with acceptable levels of job experiences. The analysis result confirms the specific roles of the three moderators in social media adoption for organizational communication. The present study contributes to the literature by developing a theoretical modeling of ambivalent employee perceptions about establishing social media connections with co-workers. This framework shows not only how both positive and negative expectations of social media connections with co-workers are formed based on expectancy theory of motivation, but also how such expectations lead to behavioral intentions using career success model. It also enhances understanding of how various relationships among employees can be influenced through social media use and such usage can potentially affect both performance and careers. Finally, it shows how cultural factors induced by social media use can influence relations among the coworkers.

Keywords : the social network, workplace, social capital, motivation

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