Employee Adoption of Corporate Blogs: A Quantitative Analysis

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Abstract

A new form of computer mediated communication that promises to revolutionize the way organizations communicate is internal corporate blogs. However, the academic literature on this relatively new phenomenon is limited. In this study, we apply the traditional theories of technology adoption and innovation diffusion to examine the role of socio-demographic characteristics and social networks in blog adoption by employees in a large multi-national corporation. The results indicate that individual characteristics such as age are negatively correlated with adoption, while there is no significant impact of gender. At the same time, managerial influences and usage in spatial networks explain much of the variance in adoption. We elaborate on the significance of these findings, and discuss future research plans in this direction.

1. Introduction

Information and communication are the lifeblood of organizations. As new technologies emerge in the business landscape, it is important to understand their relevance and examine their adoption path within organizations. One form of communication technology that promises to revolutionize the way organizations communicate both within and outside their boundaries is “corporate blogs”. Blogs are a part of the new genre of computer mediated communication (CMC) referred to by various terms such as social media, new media and social computing. Yochai Benkler [1] characterizes them as ‘peer production systems’ through which community of users pool their resources to produce high rated information embedded goods, sometimes altogether replacing the traditional mechanisms of firms and markets.

While blogs have been popular for quite some time, organizations have started to realize their importance and embrace these technologies. Recently, many Fortune 500 firms such as HP, Xerox, IBM and CISCO have deployed organization wide blogging platforms and encourage employees to use these tools in day to day work processes [2]. Corporate blogs are being used for external (interaction with customers and important stakeholders) as well as internal communication (intra-organizational communication.)

In this study we focus on internal corporate blogs. Internal corporate blogs encompass all non-public blogs hosted within the organization on their intranets. Employees use such blogs during the course of their daily responsibilities, to share expertise on products and services, to voice opinions, and to initiate discussions on issues of interest to other employees. Blogs protect the ownership of employee ideas. Overall, there is a general belief that blogs in combination with other social computing tools can be the catalyst to help create a true learning organization characterized by collaboration and sharing, and collective knowledge creation and assimilation. They are also considered as a tool for workforce journalism, an activity that can influence an organization’s external presentation through public facing communication channels. Further, the younger generations are growing up with the everyday use of these tools and will expect to have the same tools at hand once they join the future work force.

Recently, there has been a growing academic interest in this new form of intra-organizational communication. Parameswaran and Whinston [3] provide a general overview of blogs (and other social computing platforms) and identify their salient characteristics and utility within organizations. Efimova and Grudin [4] examine the use of blogs as personal communication and knowledge management tools within Microsoft, and emphasize on the benefits to both individuals and organizations. Kolari et al. [5] apply innovative techniques to model the reach and impact of blogs in the corporate hierarchy, and examine the social networks enabled by intra-corporate blogs. More recently, Jackson, Yates and Orlikowski [6] and Jina et al. [7] explore employees’ use of internal corporate blogs in large multi-national corporations such as IBM. They apply both econometric and survey methods to delineate the social and informational aspects of blog usage. While these studies have enhanced our general understanding of the relatively new blogging phenomenon, the question of ‘who will participate?’, and ‘why do they participate is?’ largely remains unanswered. Our study attempts to
explore these important questions. Specifically, the main objectives of the study were:

- To understand the socio-demographic characteristics of employees using corporate blogs
- To examine the impact of social and normative influences on employees’ adoption of blogs as collaboration and communication tools.

To this end, we draw upon theories from extant research on organizational technology adoption. We combine perspectives from technology adoption research [8], and innovation diffusion theories [9] to develop and test a model of corporate blog adoption in a US based large multi-national firm. At the same time, we compare and contrast the applicability of these theories to the new form of social media as opposed to the traditional organizational technologies studied previously.

2. Blogs & Technology Adoption

A blog (or ‘weblog) is essentially a diary of personal reflections that is shared on the WWW by the author (please refer to [10] and [3] for an overview of blogs). Each reflection is termed as a ‘post’. Readers can react to the posts of the blogger, and these comments are attached to the main post for other readers to examine. Blogs also have a link to the other sections of the same blog or various other website. Each post is specified by a URL (known as ‘permalink’) that helps other bloggers to trackback to the posts. Often bloggers publish a list of other blogs on their radar called the blogroll. With more and more blogs emerging it becomes increasingly difficult to keep track of everything that’s going on. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) and other blog feed formats such as ‘Atom’ enable the automatic syndication of numerous blogs. RSS software aggregates all postings of those blogs a user is subscribed to into headline update messages, which link directly to the originating blog posts. The user is hence able to keep track of all the favorite blogs, and select only those messages of interest for reading. This set of features allows blogs to rapidly connect to each other and as a consequence, enables rapid information dissemination. One of the advantages of blogs is that they combine the immediacy of up-to-the-minute posts, latest first, with a strong sense of the author’s personality, passions, and point of view. Further, as opposed to the previously studied social media such as usenet groups and online communities, the information in blogs is not moderated by the large number of moderators and other members. The promise of the authors’ personal touch combined with the speed of dissemination makes blogs one of the most preferred forms of communication over the Internet.

Technology adoption researchers have proposed wide range of models and factors that have an influence on employee adoption of innovative organizational technology. At the same time, blogs have certain characteristics that differentiate them from traditional organizational technologies. Primarily, blogs are often termed as bottom-up technologies that have been popular among employees even before any organization mandated their use. The use of blogs often spreads through a group of highly interested individuals who introduce the technology within the organization and popularize it through their social networks. Secondly, blogs have become the primary tools of self expression for the younger generation. As these youngsters enter the workforce, they would have already had extensive experience using these tools, and merely transfer the same to the workplace. However, in the work setting, these tools are also used for collaboration, knowledge transfer and content creation, which, as we know from previous research, is the forte of experienced and more mature employees. Further, blogs and the associated set of technologies mentioned previously are easy to use and rather intuitive in their application. Therefore, even employees not very proficient in other forms of technology might easily adopt blogs. These inherent contradictions raise certain interesting questions regarding the influence of previously studied socio-demographic characteristics on adoption. Considering these unique characteristics, we believe it is interesting to examine the applicability of previous set of TAM theories in the context of blogs.

3. Research Framework

In this study, we adopt Roger’s [9] definition of adoption as “…the decision to make full use of an innovation as the best course of action available.” In an organizational context, unless individual employees fully assimilate the new technology into the day to day work practices, the potential value of the innovation is never fully realized. Within technology acceptance studies, a recurrent theme is that adoption is predicated on perceived beliefs and affects held towards the focal innovation [11]. These cognitive beliefs are reflected in the individual’s attitude towards a technology. Attitudes can be changed/ influenced by external stimuli such as social influences and subjective norms, and are also mediated by the individual characteristics such as socio-demographic variables, company/job tenure, and experience/knowledge with the particular
class of innovation [12]. We posit that 1) individual characteristics (age, gender, and hierarchical level), 2) contextual factors (managerial influences) and 3) social influences (participation in the peer networks of an individual employee) have a significant impact on the adoption of social computing platforms. Also, since blog posts are the primary form of communication in this context, we specified the dependent variable as the number of posts of each individual blogger. The research framework is shown in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Research Framework for Corporate Blog Adoption

### 3.1. Age, Gender & Organizational Level

Age and gender are known to have an important influence on individuals’ perceptions towards technology. For instance, age was consistently found to have a moderating effect on performance expectancy (usefulness), effort expectancy (ease of use), social influence, and facilitating conditions. Morris and Venkatesh [13] found a direct effect of age on usefulness perceptions for both short-term and long-term usage. Later, Venkatesh et al. [8] found that older workers showed weaker willingness to adopt new IT products and place more importance on subjective norms (social influence). Researchers attribute the effect of age to various aspects such as differences in processing complex stimuli and allocating attention [14] and age-related memory deficits [15]. Therefore, technology characteristics such as ease of use and trialability achieve more salience for older individuals than younger ones. Similarly, empirical evidence demonstrates that gender accounts for the differences in perceptions regarding ease of use and usefulness toward information systems and thus have different system usage behavior [16]. Research on gender differences indicates that men tend to be highly task-oriented [17] and, therefore, performance expectancies, which focus on task accomplishment, are likely to be especially salient to men.

The hierarchical level of the employee is also considered an important determinant of new technology adoption. However, there are conflicting viewpoints on its influence. Research suggests that increasing tenure leads employees to become stale and resistant to change [18]. For instance, top managers with long tenure in their respective organizations are likely to have obligations to existing organizational constituencies that have vested interests in the status quo. The other point of view is that with increasing tenure top managers become more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the organization as well as its needs. Therefore, they are in a better position to recognize the value of the innovation to the organization, and as a result, are more willing to engage in change efforts and to adopt innovations [19].

Previous research in online communities and knowledge management suggests that contribution is unlikely unless an individual has the requisite knowledge to share and distribute. Since the personal expertise increases with experience and level in the organization, individuals higher in the organizational hierarchy might participate more in the information sharing networks [20].

Although these characteristics have been extensively studied in the literature, we expect certain differences in the context of corporate blogs. For instance, Kumar et al. [21], based on the analysis of around 1.3 million blogs, found that more than 60% of the bloggers were between ages 17 and 24, and that there was a strong correlation between age, lifecycle stage and the topical interests of bloggers. Similarly, Schler et al. [22] find that males and females do not differ significantly in the extent of blogging but greatly differed in their topics of interest. Males were more inclined to write about politics, business and technology whereas females discussed topics related to personal lives and relationships. On the influence of tenure, Burke and Kraut [23] indicate that the success rate of individual contributors in Wikipedia (to become administrators yielding more power) increased with the extent of their article edits and also the diversity of articles they edited within various Wikipedia domains. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that major contributors to politics and technology oriented blogs are above the age 30, and with considerable experience in their respective domains. Based on this discussion, we posit that age, gender and organizational tenure have a significant impact on individual adoption of corporate blogs.

### 3.2. Managerial Influences

Managerial Influences are also known to play a major role in encouraging adoption. While the TAM studies provide good predictions of IT usage, they
typically do not incorporate the role of managerial influences on intra-organizational use of IT [24]. ‘Managerial influence’ is the extent to which the immediate supervisors explicitly encourage their subordinates to use the new tools. IS research also lends support to the fact that manager impact adoption through their own usage [25], persuasive communication [26] and the employee’s perception of the opinion of the managers (i.e. subjective norms, [11]). However, in highly decentralized organizational environments characterized by looser structure, increased professionalization of the subordinates and freer communication, persuasive message by a competent person or member of the social system could be more effective and less costly than formal authority. For instance, Zmud [27] suggests that managerial influence is more effective in administrative innovations than technical innovations, since in the latter case, lower level employees may doubt the adequacy of their management’s expertise to judge the efficacy of an innovation. On the whole, IS research was quite equivocal on the importance of managerial influences.

In the case of corporate blogs, certain interesting trends have emerged. Lee, Hwang, and Lee [28] analyze the corporate blogging strategies of Fortune 500 firms, and find that most often organizations tend to maintain control through a top-down blogging strategy and rarely allow complete employee autonomy by a bottom-up strategy. Their study reveals that organizations are still trying to maintain a fine balance between complete autonomy and control. There is an increasing debate on the extent of freedom that an employee is entitled to while using blogs in a work environment. Various concerns such as untimely leakage of information, loss of productivity and bad public relations have forced organizations to put in place stringent blogging policies. At the same time, organizations are encouraging employees to use the blogs for more internal communication. Given that corporate blogs are used in a work environment of which immediate managers are an inherent part, we posit that managerial usage of blogs will confer certain amount of legitimacy and subsequently influence individual adoption.

### 3.3. Social Networks

Adoption is largely dependent on social influences resulting from active or passive action of others [9]. There are at least two theoretical streams that address the importance of social influences. The critical mass theory [29], social influence theory of media [30] and social information processing theory [31] suggest that individuals’ perception of a media is influenced by salient others. Specifically, others can exert influence by 1) serving as a behavioral role model by their own use of the technology, 2) explicitly using the technology, and 3) providing feedback to others on their use of the medium. The acceptance of the technology by the individual’s peers (e.g. superiors, colleagues and cohorts) may signal its importance and advantages and motivate the individual to imitate [32]. In an organizational context, three aspects of an individual social network need to be considered ([33], [34]):

a. **Spatial Network:** Organizations intentionally create spatial networks through office landscaping/layout to group together individuals and departments with similar tasks. Simply being in the same location increases the chances of social interaction, and subsequently exposure to other’s attitude and behavior towards technology [34]. The spatial element of social interactions is also supported by innovation diffusion literature. Rogers [9] stressed on the importance of space and neighborhood effects on diffusion process and argued that space is probably the least studied variables in the diffusion process. Spatial networks also enable diffusion through the vicarious learning process by which individuals learn about the utility of the new technology merely by observing the behavior and payoffs of others within the spatial networks.

b. **Relational Network:** people influence and are influenced by others with whom they directly interact. Such patterns of direct communication might be similar or different to the ones prescribed by the organizational structure. Burt [35] refers to these as the cohesive group within which individuals develop attitude similarity after repeated interactions with salient others. The less direct this interaction, lesser will be the influence. Relational networks in an organization can exist in the form of subunits or departments. Employees who work in the same departments are likely to communicate and act based on collective understanding about agreed upon tasks [36]. Communication within departments has the potential to forge agreements regarding individual actions and also control the stimuli to which an individual is exposed to in the course of his/her organizational activities.

The relative influence of these networks on individual adoption varies in an organizational context.
While prior research suggests that the impact of relational influence on technology adoption will be greater than that of spatial influence, the connection is not clear in case of tools such as blogs. For instance, relational networks are characterized by high task interdependence that requires higher levels of coordination and communication. Assuming that social computing tools enhance this communication, individuals within cohesive relational networks have more incentive to adopt. At the same time, weak ties enable information exchange between individuals who communicate infrequently. Strong ties often expose individuals to repeated and redundant knowledge. In this regard, weak ties provide an individual with an opportunity to access information and resources that are often not available in her immediate cohesive network [37]. We argue that the fundamental premise of blogs is to enable access to these weak ties. For instance, Jackson, Yates and Orlikowski [30] found that some of the primary motives of corporate bloggers include “...building a network, getting to know someone, social networking meeting people from other parts of the company/outside my circle, making a friend, and finding an expert” [38]. More specifically, they cite a comment by one of the bloggers in the firm: “It has given me connections to people around the company that I would have not otherwise have. In rare cases, it answers a technical question I’m struggling with that none of my immediate coworkers has an answer for.” (p.5) In large corporations, blogs create an informal mechanism that links disparate and far-flung parts of the organization into a constructive contact. Therefore, we posit that relational and spatial networks influence blog adoption and that the spatial networks have a stronger influence on adoption than relational networks.

5. Research Hypotheses

Based on the discussion in the previous sections, we tested the below hypotheses in this study.

Age, Gender & Level

H1: Age of the employee has a negative impact on individual adoption.

H2: Gender will have no influence on adoption.

H3: An employee’s level in the organization is positively related to adoption.

Managerial Influences

H4: The extent of posts by an individual’s immediate managers has a positive influence on individual adoption.

Social Networks

H5: The higher the number of posts in an individual’s spatial network, greater will be the adoption.

H6: The higher the number of posts in an individual’s relational network, greater will be the adoption.

H7: The number of posts in the individual’s spatial network will have a relatively stronger influence on adoption than those in the relational network.

6. Construct Measures

We measure the dependent variable BLOG by the total number of blog entries made by each employee. GENDER is measured as a binary variable (0 for Female and 1 for Male), and AGE as a categorical variable where Age=1 if the user is from the Millennial generation (born after 1980), Age =2 for the GenX users (born between 1965 and 1980), Age =3 for the Boomer generation (born between 1945 and 1965) and the Silent generation (born before 1945). In our regression analysis, we create 3 dummy variables – SILENT, BOOMER, and GENX to represent the three generations. The Millennial generation is the omitted variable and is used as the reference category. We measure LEVEL in the hierarchy as an ordinal variable.
from 0 to 9 where 9 is the highest level in the organizational hierarchy (this system of classification is followed by the firm).

Finally, we measure the social influence variables for each employee as follows: we measure spatial influence on BLOG by calculating the average number of posts by other employees in the same branch office (BRANCH_BLOG). We also calculate the managerial influence by measuring the blog usage by employees who are one level higher than the user in the same department (MGR_BLOG). The descriptive statistics of the data are presented in Table 1.

### Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean (sd)</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BLOG</td>
<td>10.2 (27.4)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SILENT</td>
<td>0.02 (0.14)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOOMER</td>
<td>0.3 (0.46)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENX</td>
<td>0.45 (0.49)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>0.74 (0.43)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL</td>
<td>3.76 (1.65)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGR_BLOG</td>
<td>2.11 (1.89)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>24.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRANCH_BLOG</td>
<td>2.13 (1.68)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>16.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7. Results

The results of our OLS analysis are summarized in Table 2.

### Table 2: Individual and social influences on adoption of social computing platform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>BLOG</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTERCEPT</td>
<td>1.3 (2.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SILENT</td>
<td>-7.7 (4.0)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOOMER</td>
<td>-5.6 (2.2)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENX</td>
<td>6.5 (1.67)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GENDER</td>
<td>0.52 (1.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL</td>
<td>0.4 (0.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MGR_BLOG</td>
<td>1.1 (0.67)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRANCH_BLOG</td>
<td>2.0 (0.3)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R-square</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The standard deviation is in the brackets and the ‘*’ indicate significance (* implies significance at 0.1 level, ** at 0.05 level, and *** at 0.01 level). None of the mean centered independent variables are highly correlated. The variance inflation factors (VIF) are all below the accepted level of 10 [39]. The results show that the coefficients of SILENT and BOOMER are negative and significant, but the coefficient of GENX is positive and significant. This finding is interesting because it suggests that the blog usage by employees is not monotonic in age. While the older generations (SILENT and BOOMER) use blogs less than the Millennial generation (those born after 1980); GenX (those born between 1965 and 1980) use blogs more than the Millenial generation. Therefore, our analysis provides mixed support for Hypothesis H1.

The coefficient of MGR_POSTS and BRANCH_POSTS are positive and significant suggesting that higher usage by a user’s managers or by other employees at the branch where she works are likely to impact the number of posts made by the user. This provides support for hypotheses H4 and H5. The coefficient of GENDER and LEVEL is not significant, suggesting that there is no significant difference between men and women, or between employees at different levels of organizational hierarchy in their blog usage. The support for the hypothesis on GENDER is consistent with recent studies on blog usage mentioned previously. Thus hypotheses H2 and H3 are not supported. The results of our hypothesis testing are summarized in Table 3.

### Table 3: Summary of hypotheses testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Supported?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1 – Age</td>
<td>Mixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2 – Gender</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3 – Level in Hierarchy</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4 – Managerial Influence</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5 – Spatial Influence</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7.1 Ongoing Research

So far, our analysis tests Hypotheses H1 to H5. We expect to collect more data and arrive at measures for employees’ relational networks. This will enable us to test for hypotheses H6 and H7 and present the results at the HICSS conference.

### 8. Discussion & Implications

To the best of our knowledge, this study is one of the first to model the role of demographics and social influences on blog usage in the corporate environment. The research is important because more and more organizations are adopting social computing technologies such as blogs to enable innovation, enhance morale, and improve customer satisfaction. We incorporate both individual specific factors such as age, gender and hierarchical level, as well as social
influence factors such as influence of one’s managers, department, or the whole office.

Our results offer several interesting insights to managers and academics alike on the adoption of blogs in organizations. One, we show that it is not always the youngest people in an organization who use blogs the most. This is surprising considering that blogs and other social computing technologies such as MySpace and Facebook are most associated with younger generations. This result is contrary to the findings of previous research on adoption of traditional organizational technologies. As more organizational employees of different age groups tend to become comfortable with different forms of technology, perhaps age might not be such an important factor in predicting technology usage compared to other factors such as willingness to share knowledge and personal innovativeness. In this regard, organizations focusing on promoting non-traditional technologies such as social computing platforms should move beyond the traditional understanding of the impact of age and gender on technology adoption and usage. In driving these initiatives, organizations may have to focus not only on the younger employees but also on those individuals that actively participate and share information, and give incentives to these individuals to discuss the benefits of the technology with other employees of the same age group.

Our findings also suggest that employees’ usage of blogs is positively associated with blog usage by the employees’ managers. Given that the blog usage is occurring in a corporate environment, we expect that there will be a certain amount of both formal and informal organizational mandate despite the claims of the management that blogs are bottom-up technologies and their usage is entirely voluntary. Contemporary evidence [40] suggests that organizations are yet to fully understand the usage and impact of social computing technologies such as blogs, and still do not have the necessary policies and procedures that can carefully balance leveraging grass roots enthusiasm with meeting corporate goals and policies. Corporate blog entries are essentially work-related information that has a personal touch and an informal style. The lack of clear policies often creates an uncertain environment that impedes a free sharing of information and eventually the sustained use of the technology. Therefore, managerial usage and supervision should be recognized as an important intervention even in the case of voluntary technologies such as corporate blogs. Managers can play the role of champions or sponsors of such technologies, and channel the necessary resources to create suitable conditions for the employees to actively adopt innovative technologies. The above result also lends credence to the concepts such as ‘structuration’ [6] which suggests that technologies are subject to some amount of institutionalization, and are embedded in the routines and practices of the situated context. Organizations are “social systems of collective action that structure and regulate the actions and cognitions of organizational participants through rules, resources, and social relations.” These practices consist of specific expectations regarding the use of blogs to achieve communicative goals. Therefore, even when the general claim is that blogging is voluntary, the information sharing routines of our focal firm might have influenced individual usage to a certain degree.

Further, the usage of blogs by other employees in the same branch office is associated with higher blog usage by an individual. In large organizations where several hundred employees work in a single location, it is unlikely for an employee to know every other employee. Therefore our result that the cumulative usage of blogs by other employees in the same branch office illustrates the importance of weak ties in technology diffusion. A likely reason is the unique nature of social networking technologies such as blogs which enable an individual to locate and communicate with people outside one’s sphere of interactions. Employees derive the core information related to everyday work through face to face communication as well as traditional collaborative and content management systems already operative in the organization. Therefore, blogs are most used when the employee desires to activate the ties with individuals that she might not communicate on a daily basis. As previous research suggests, such weak ties are rich sources of new and non-redundant information, and enhance the value of an individual employee’s social networks. Although the strength of weak ties has been studied in varied contexts, more research is needed to explain our interesting findings, especially as new tools such as blogs evolve in the corporate landscape.

These results have some important implications for organizations that are deploying blogs for internal communication and collaboration. The relational networks (strong ties) such as work groups and departments are more formal and increase the value of the new technology through local positive externalities and display of norms that either legitimize or devalue the technology. At the same time, our results show that employees seem to give importance to the weak ties enabled by blogs. The weak ties intertwine these formal networks with the more informal networks of the organization that give individual employees, access to the “technical and organizational advice” networks [41]. Organizations
can tap into the social capital that originates from both the formal and informal networks. In fact, corporate blogs may be the precursor to traditional collaboration. These technologies may provide the missing structures needed to enable true collaboration in organizations. Groupware and traditional knowledge management systems never reached wide-spread critical mass that organizations anticipated. If blogs can truly make it easier for workers to find, link to, share, and use knowledge then the organizational impact will be transformational.

9. Limitations & Future Research Plans

While we use traditional technology adoption framework in this study, the unique characteristics of blogs, as well as the unique dataset on actual usage enables us to present several new insights. However, the study has numerous limitations.

The results of usage are based on a self-selected sample of individuals who adopted the blogs. There are many employees who start using the blogs and very few actually continue using them and continually update their posts. The investigation in this study does not capture the characteristics of these ‘drop-outs’. Insights into the causes behind these dropouts can provide better tools to managers and technology designers who drive these initiatives.

The study uses only log data to analyze the adoption and usage. However, this prevents us from exploring the socio-demographics, motivations, and procedural rules that drive employee usage of blogs in a corporate environment. Since blog usage is most often not mandated by the organization and there are very little explicit benefits tied to usage, it is still not clear why employees take time out of their day-to-day activities and participate in sharing information via these platforms. While we can draw many insights from previous research in online communities and open source technologies, more research is needed to understand the unique context of blogs and similar social computing platforms.

Finally, our research is primarily a case study wherein the unique characteristics of the organization, the employees and even the technology might limit the generalizability of the findings. Although our results broadly concur with some of the blog specific studies mentioned previously, researchers should employ different methodologies to study the unique phenomenon of blogs across a cross section of industries and organizations. This becomes essential as social computing tools such as blogs are becoming increasingly popular in the corporate landscape today.

In this context, we propose three specific enhancements for future research.

1) We intend to triangulate the results of the objective data with a series of interviews that we are conducting at the firm. The results will inform a large scale organizational survey that will allow us to more concretely address the perceptual aspects of employee blogging. There is also a need for a more comprehensive theoretical model that can guide social computing adoption in general. The results of the above triangulation will allow us to propose a theoretical model. We hope to present these results at the conference.

2) The second interesting aspect of blogs is the practice of tagging. As we discussed previously, the usage of tagging and trackbacks creates a social bookmarking system that enhances the utility of the blogs. Further, when individual bloggers refer to each other, and create tag ‘clouds’, it leads to rapid information dissemination, and also formation of topics (and blogger) clusters. Recent studies show that such social networks and clusters of blogs have both positive and negative consequences. However, such information is not available in the case of corporate blogs. We intent to use our unique data to further explore the structural and social attributes of the blogs in the organization.

3) Also, in tools such as blogs or discussion boards, a contributor often gets positive (or negative) feedback in the form of comments for their helpfulness or innovative content. The impact of such feedback on individual motivations has been extensively researched [42]. Further, participation in online communities is often a social process that depends on the extent of responsiveness from other members [43]. Previous research suggests that delays in responses and feedback from other members are one of the reasons for exit from online communities. We also plan to study the impact of ‘thank-you’ votes and incorporate the concept into our model.

10. References


