

A Comparative Perspective of Knowledge Management via Social Media: India and China

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Abstract

This conceptual paper provides current knowledge management (KM) initiatives via social media in India and China. India and China are considered leading economies in today's global market. This research adopts a multi-disciplinary theoretical approach showcasing two different frameworks in understanding how knowledge is adapted via social media. This scholarly article enhances the extant literature on cross-cultural management by providing a comparative perspective of KM practices in large Indian and progressive Chinese organizations. This research provides two theoretical models and hypotheses that can be tested by scholars. The paper also provides implications for practice by identifying guidelines for global managers while operating in these two cultures.

Introduction

Knowledge management (KM) can be defined as interacting, learning, sharing, and storing of relevant business information among employees in any firm or industry. The planned management of knowledge and its organized dissemination among employees is an important characteristic of KM. In 2000, the introduction of interactive social media (Web 2.0) allowed firms to use technology to enhance knowledge capital (Chawla & Joshi, 2010; Okyere-Kwakye & Nor, 2011; Teo et al., 2011). Knowledge can be further distinguished into planned or unplanned methods of learning. Planned learning refers to any structured programs while unplanned learning refers to informal discussions or sharing of ideas (Okyere-Kwakye & Nor, 2011).

Social media or social network can be defined as any technology platform that allows individuals to communicate with one another, manage their profiles, exchange product or service ideas, and share industry knowledge. Social media platforms can be further distinguished into private, public, personal, or professional websites (Datta, 2010). Social media platforms offer employees the opportunity to create planned or unplanned methods of knowledge acquisition. For planned methods, organizations have to take the effort to develop specific learning initiatives with clear knowledge outcomes. For unplanned methods, employees may collaborate in any informal way of learning such as asking questions or discussing ideas. Consequently learning via social media can be considered unique as it allows employees to enhance their KSAs (knowledge,

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skills, and abilities) via both structured or unstructured methods (Ojala, 2005; Teo et al., 2011). Organizations provide KM via social media through a variety of tools such as blogs, discussion forums, tagging systems weblogs, and wikis among others (Iyer et al., 2011; Ojala, 2005; Razmerita & Kirchner, 2011).

This paper will focus on understanding knowledge management via social media in two of the largest countries in Asia, India and China. The BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) economies are major players in the global economy today. The US has moved 2.3 million service jobs overseas and GE predicts 60% of its revenue will be from China and India (Meredith, 2008). China and India have become the world's second and fourth largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) (Meredith, 2008).

The paper will be structured as follows: 1) The theoretical section will detail two frameworks that can be adopted to understand knowledge management, 2) KM in India and China will detail and describe such initiatives via social media in these countries, 3) The discussion section will integrate the theoretical frameworks and the KM characteristics in the Indian and Chinese contexts, 4) The conclusion will address scholarly contributions and implications for practice.

Theoretical Framework: SNS & KM

This section identifies two theoretical frameworks that can be adapted to analyze knowledge management via social media, the social constructivist and transactive memory systems (TMS).

The social constructivist theory emphasizes that learning is a result of meaningful interactions. Vygotsky, the distinguished Russian scholar of the early twentieth century, pioneered the early concepts of knowledge and learning from the social perspective. He suggested that any learning occurs only if members question, interact, and discuss their ideas collaboratively. His premise was that learning through any form of social contact leads to reflective inquiry and knowledge acquisition. His philosophy emphasized a collective spirit to achieve positive learning outcomes (Meloche et al., 2009).

Orlikowski & Barley (2001) added the adoption of technology to expand the understanding of the social constructivist theory. Members of any organization can develop rich internal or external networks via technology. Technology can serve as a critical nucleus to create vibrant learning communities. Orlikowski (2000) introduced the concept of "technologies-in-practice" suggesting that technology can provide organizations positive outcomes if employees engage with it consistently. Members can develop their own social networks providing significant knowledge capital. For instance, Lotus notes, a software program, allows the members within any departments to share knowledge, solve problems, or store information. Organizations have realized that Lotus notes is a technology tool that allows for rich internal learning in a collaborative way.

Vygotsky's and Orlikowski's theories are relevant to this research as it suggests social interactions and technology as key predictors to expand knowledge (Meloche et al., 2009;

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Orlikowski, 2000; Orlikowski & Barley, 2001). Learning via social media allows employees to develop industry specific information creating distinctive e-knowledge communities. Such internal workforce characteristics help organizations create sustainable competitive advantages (Iyer et al., 2011).

The Transactive Memory Systems (TMS) is another theoretical framework that provides considerable insight of knowledge management via social media. TMS includes the concepts of acquiring, storing, and retrieving of information in either individual or collective learning (Wegner, 1986). Scholars (Wegner, 1986; Wegner, Erber, & Raymond, 1991) conducted a research on couples and families and identified that individuals that are close to their spouses or family members largely adopt TMS. An example to illustrate this point- a husband might consider the wife to be an “expert” on their daughter’s extra-curricular activities and ask his wife, “when is Sarah annual ballet performance”? In TMS terminology, the husband asks his wife to “retrieve” her “stored” knowledge on their daughter activities as the wife generally “acquires” such information. Thus the wife is considered to be a SME (subject matter expert) on the daughter’s extra-curricular activities (Kanawattanachai & Yoo, 2007).

The concept of understanding TMS was later extended to organizations which demonstrated to have positive outcomes on team performances (Kanawattanachai & Yoo, 2007; Moreland & Myaskovsky, 2000). Scholars suggest organizations’ abilities to create, share, and apply knowledge among their employees play a large role in creating competitive advantages (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Nonaka, Ikujiro, 1994). Teams, a critical aspect in knowledge-based organizations play key roles in distinguishing their firms in their industries. However, there seems to be two obstacles underlying knowledge creation and collaboration process in teams. The first obstacle is that most of the knowledge that exists in organizations is considered tacit or unspoken knowledge (Nonaka, I. & Toyama, 2003; Polanyi, 1966). Employees who have tacit knowledge usually do not express their information verbally or share it freely with others. The second obstacle is that organizational knowledge is usually unevenly distributed among individuals. Employees may have varying expertise based on their educational and work experiences (Boland, Tenkasi, & Te’eni, 1994; Hutchins, 1995). A TMS, if well-developed and used effectively, can solve these two obstacles by encouraging team members in maintaining, storing, and sharing of any organizational information (Jarvenpaa & Majchrzak, 2008). This will enhance any team’s ability to leverage its performance significantly creating essential benefits for organizations (Choi, Lee, & Yoo, 2010). The next two sections will provide salient trends of how Indian and Chinese firms initiate KM projects via social media¹.

India and Knowledge Management via Social Media

There are several characteristics associated with successful KM programs via social media in large Indian organizations. This paper identifies characteristics in large organizations as small and medium organizations may not have the resources to establish such initiatives. First, Indian organizations tend to assign personnel (KM Directors or Managers) specifically to supervise KM initiatives. These initiatives allow employers to measure accountability, track any

¹ Only 3 characteristics are being presented for each country in this paper due to the page limit. The original paper has 7 characteristics.

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progress, and support the hierarchical culture (Aktharsha, Anisa, & Ali, 2012; Iyer et al., 2011; Teo et al., 2011). For instance, HP India, identified “ambassadors” or special representatives to market their KM initiatives within the organization. These ambassadors advertise the positive effects of KM programs, provide frequent updates on its learning outcomes, and receive reports from participating employees (Teo et al., 2011) . Second, Indian organizations tend to monitor learning progress diligently via various metrics to identify if employees are actually contributing to the knowledge capital of the organizations. Learning metrics adopted are identifying number of visitors to social media sites, testing sessions, peer ratings, or intranet surveys (Aktharsha, Anisa, & Ali, 2012; Iyer et al., 2011; Teo et al., 2011).

Third, Indian organizations provide a reward system for employees that initiate relevant knowledge content among its employees and customers. This aspect of tying rewards to KM initiatives encourages and persuades employees to contribute to KM programs via social media. Organizations also arrange corporate events to recognize and applaud the winners publicly (Iyer et al., 2011; Teo et al., 2011). A case in point- leading Indian companies such as Infosys and Bharti Ltd reward their employees with “currency points” when they provide important contributions that will help enhance their internal knowledge capital (Chawla & Joshi, 2010). In an empirical study of 80 small and medium IT organizations, integrating rewards to KM initiatives was a key predictor in its success and outcomes (Chada & Ritika, 2012).

Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed (*the final paper has 6 hypotheses-only a sample is provided in this paper due to the page limit*):

H1: *Having KM personnel (directors, managers, or leaders) in Indian organizations will have a positive effect on the implementation of KM activities.*

H2: *The adoption of metrics in Indian organizations will positively influence the outcome of KM activities.*

H3: *Reward systems in Indian organizations will positively influence the contribution of KM practices.*

China and Knowledge Management via Social Media

The theme of knowledge management emerged slowly in Chinese organizations since 2000 (Zhao, de Pablos, & Qi, 2012). Most Chinese firms do not follow a robust knowledge management work culture as compared to their western counterparts. A survey conducted by China Market Intelligence Center (CMIC) and China Computer Users in 2007 identified that almost 50% of the surveyed companies are still in its embryonic stages in implementing knowledge management initiatives. Also, 32% of the surveyed firms said that they do not have any plans for knowledge management implementation (Zhao, de Pablos, & Qi, 2012). Employers in Chinese firms also believed erroneously that knowledge management is synonymous to document management as adopted in IT departments (Information Technology) departments. Therefore, they perceive that it does not have any positive management or organizational implications (Liu & Porter, 2010; Zhao, de Pablos, & Qi, 2012). However, progressive Chinese enterprises have realized the critical role KM plays and are taking great strides towards its adoption. The winners of the 2012 Asian Most Admired Knowledge Enterprise (MAKE) include four Chinese organizations which emphasized the development of knowledge management

(Teleos Executive Summary, 2012). Thus other Chinese organizations are slowly realizing the importance of such organizational initiatives (Lee et al., 2008; Teleos, 2003-2007; Voelpel & Han, 2005).

There are several characteristics associated with progressive Chinese organizations that adopt KM via social media. First, Chinese firms are making an effort towards cultivating a knowledge-driven enterprise culture. Progressive organizations, a recent trend in China, are taking an egalitarian management approach to ensure the success of any organization is the responsibility of all levels of management. It encourages employees from various levels to share knowledge using different social media tools. These progressive initiatives are very different from traditional practices of conventional Chinese organizations. In traditional organizations, senior managers have absolute authority restricting subordinates' access to any important information (Ardichvili et al., 2006; Hofstede, 2001). The lower-level employees also follow the instructions of their supervisors submissively. Senior managers are not willing to share knowledge or collaborate with lower-level employees in any form of communication (Siau, Erickson, & Nah, 2010). Such one-way, top-down information flow restricts knowledge creation, transfer, and business innovation (Martinsons & Westwood, 1997).

Second, KM programs embody principles of the Confucianism spirit, a cultural tradition unique to the Chinese society. Senior leadership is completely responsible in developing knowledge workers through any KM initiative. The Confucianism values consist of the five code of ethics which symbolize hierarchy, loyalty, respect, virtue, and structure (Lee et al., 2008, p.73). Chinese organizations even today try to embody these deeply held values in their work-related practices (Lockett, 1988; Sheh, 2001). Therefore any KM initiatives via social media need to have top management direction and support. The Confucianism norms carry a positive influence on learning as it motivates employees to gain respect and build reputation which are cherished values in the Chinese society (Voelpel & Han, 2005). For example, Lenovo (www. Lenovo.com), the largest IT enterprise in China, has focused on recruiting and socializing its workers so as to develop a knowledge sharing ethos (Burrows, Drummond, & Martinsons, 2005).

Third, non-monetary incentives (such as higher job levels, challenging jobs) have a very strong impact on employees' motivation to participate in KM practices. Although rewards (such as cell phones or laptop computers) are considered important incentives for junior employees, senior employees prefer non-monetary incentives for contributing their time on sharing knowledge via social media tools (Voelpel & Han, 2005). Non-monetary rewards have a positive impact because Chinese employees deeply care more about their professional images and self-esteem (Huang, Davison, & Gu, 2008). Organizations reward employees by promoting them to higher levels or providing challenging jobs. Other examples firms provide could include naming the products/services after employees who identify innovative ideas. Employees like being recognized for their knowledge and proficiency as it provides a definite strata of social status (Voelpel & Han, 2005). Furthermore, observations reveal that emerging changes in performance evaluations and rewards positively motivate employees from some privately owned firms in knowledge sharing (Burrows, Drummond, & Martinsons, 2005).

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Based on the above discussion, three hypotheses regarding KM via social media in China are proposed (*the final paper has 5 hypotheses-only a sample is provided in this paper due to the page limit*):

- H1:** *Knowledge-driven enterprise culture in Chinese organizations will have a positive effect on the implementation of KM activities.*
- H2:** *Hierarchy in Chinese organizations will have a negative effect on the implementation of KM practices.*
- H3:** *Top management direction and support will have a positive impact on KM initiatives via social media in Chinese organizations.*

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Discussion

This section will integrate the theoretical frameworks and identify how Indian and Chinese firms use the principles of these theories. The social constructivist theory has been used to describe the Indian knowledge environment as collectivist values are very valued. The TMS has been used to integrate the Chinese KM values as the concept of identifying “experts” and status is very meaningful in their culture.

Vygotsky suggested that any interactive learning becomes deeply embedded as it allows learners adequate time for inquiry and reflection. Knowledge achievement via social media allows members to participate in such intellectual exploration and skill-building (Meloche et al., 2009). The business world mirrors examples of social construction and learning- for instance, in any projects-based environments, employees, customers, and consultants often share and learn from one another through meaningful and consequential interpretations (Reihlen & Apel, 2007).

The Indian culture likes to share knowledge in a communal manner as it is very congruent with their collectivist culture. In-group members (same organization, college, profession, or community) of such societies cherish social interaction as it helps create boundaries. Members from such groups are very willing to share and learn from one another as such similarity in backgrounds acts like an adhesive gluing its members closer to one another (Cappelli et al., 2011).

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In today’s dynamic IT environment, an organization’s ability to provide effective mechanisms for its employees to find, create, share, and apply meaningful knowledge is indispensable to its success. Organizations may create such environments through structured adoption of the principles of TMS as it helps create SMEs within organizations. SMEs can help enhance productivity of organizations with their keen expertise and professional insight on various organizational issues (Wegner, 1986).

Social media facilitates the development of TMS in organizations as it easily allows to identify “experts” who receive, store, and retrieve information (Choi, Lee, & Yoo, 2010). For example, Neusoft Corporation, China’s leading IT solution and service provider, implements the NeuSA (Neusoft Solution Architecture)-an integrated information system for knowledge management, sharing, and transferring (MENA Report, 2012). The company offers knowledge

portals, technology journals, and online forums in order to ensure sharing of knowledge among its employees. Employees are encouraged to apply a collaborative approach to identify problems or to find solutions (MENA Report, 2012).

Conclusion

This conceptual article provides three contributions. First, it adds to the body of knowledge on cross-cultural and knowledge management literature. Scholars emphasize the need for comparative research as the global borderless market makes it imperative to understand management practices beyond domestic borders. Comparative studies address the question of etic (universality) and emic (culture-specific) concepts as practitioners debate whether to use global or local practices (Lui, Lau, & Ngo, 2004). It provide two theoretical models (please refer to models 1 and 2) that can be tested to expand the understanding of knowledge management practices.

Second, it provides implications for practice through a preliminary analysis (please refer to Table 1 and 2) that global practitioners may use to enhance their understanding of KM practices via social media. Indian organizations tend to associate extrinsic rewards with any KM initiatives, while Chinese organizations largely like to provide intrinsic rewards. Extrinsic rewards are usually external to the job (benefits, rewards), while intrinsic rewards are inherent to the job (challenging jobs, higher positions) (Iyer et al., 2011; Voelpel & Han, 2005). This is an interesting observation of this paper which may be helpful for global practitioners while designing such local practices.

Finally, this paper discusses economies that scholars (Friedman, 2006; Meredith, 2008; Nilekani, 2009) refer to as vibrant, robust, upcoming, or “rising of the rest” (Zakaria, 2011). In 2001, Goldman Sachs identified the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) nations as having tremendous potential to dominate global business markets. In 2010, the BRIC nations created approximately \$194.6 billion in foreign direct investments and international trade (Brent, 2009, Myles, 2012). This conceptual research focuses on innovative management practices in two prominent nations popularly referred to as the “elephant” (India) and the “dragon” (China) (Meredith, 2008). Multinationals have to learn to creatively adapt to different themes and markets as they participate in this multicultural village (Friedman, 2006; Meredith, 2008).

This paper is not without limitations. It is a conceptual paper that identifies and details KM practices in India and China. There are several conceptual papers (Lepak & Snell, 1999; Leidner & Kayworth, 2006) that have generated future ideas and researches. This paper provides hypotheses that can be tested and models that can produce future research for scholars who are interested in this field (please refer to theoretical models provided). Scholars who are interested to pursue quantitative or qualitative studies may do so with the hypotheses provided in this study. The unique contribution of this study is that is provides a cross-cultural comparison between KM practices in India and China that has not been addressed in the literature before. Therefore it can be considered a pioneer research in the extant field of international management.

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Appendices

Table 1: Characteristics of KM via social media in Indian organizations: Guidelines for practitioners

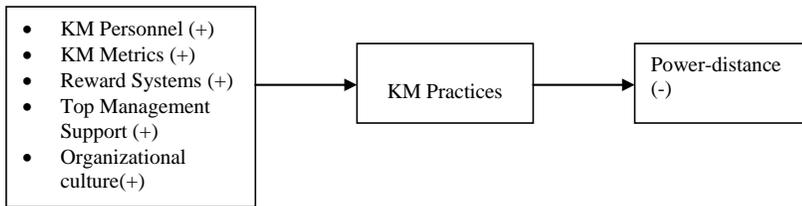
#	Characteristics	Outcomes	Citations
1.	Person/function created for learning (Eg, director of Knowledge Management)	Establishes accountability in knowledge acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aktharsha, Anisa, & Ali (2012); • Iyer, Parise, Rajagopal, & Davenport (2011); • Teo, Nishant, Goh, & Agarwal (2011)
2.	Rewards associated for exemplary participation	Encourages greater employee contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teo, Nishant, Goh, & Agarwal (2011); • Iyer, Parise, Rajagopal, & Davenport (2011)
3.	Adopting various metrics to measure learning	Helps in evaluating knowledge acquisition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aktharsha, Anisa, Ali (2012) • Iyer, Parise, Rajagopal, & Davenport (2011) • Teo, Nishant, Goh, Agarwal (2011)
4.	Superiors and subordinates intermingle while sharing knowledge	Reduces the perception of traditional hierarchies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iyer, Parise, Rajagopal, & Davenport (2011)
5.	Top management support	Ensures employees sustain the KM initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teo, Nishant, Goh, Agarwal (2011)
6.	The culture values personal learning and growth.	Employees participate willingly in KM initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harris (2010) • Harris (2012)
7.	Organizations provide employees credits/certifications towards learning	Creates internal SME (subject matter experts) and sharing of best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harris (2010) • Harris (2012)

Table 2: Characteristics of KM via social media in Chinese organizations: Guidelines for practitioners

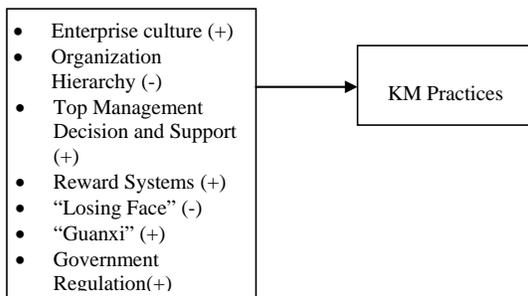
#	Characteristics	Outcomes	Citations
1.	Employees of all levels participate in knowledge sharing	Cultivates a knowledge-driven enterprise culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Siau, Erickson & Nah (2010)
2.	KM programs embody the Confucianism spirit	Helps employees accept new practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voelpel & Han (2005) • Lee et al. (2008)
3.	Non-monetary or intrinsic rewards play a strong role	Employees are motivated to achieve higher levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huang, Davison & Gu (2008) • Voelpel & Han (2005)
4.	Point system adopted for KM participation	Provides intrinsic rewards to motivate employees' participation in KM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liao et al. (2010)
5.	Chinese cultural characteristics of "losing face" and "guanxi" play important roles in knowledge-sharing	Contradictory values influences knowledge contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huang, Davison & Gu (2008) • Su, Li & Chow (2010)
6.	Internet censorship and government regulation	Employees are not forthcoming in sharing knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tan and Tan (2012) • Su, Li & Chow (2010)

Theoretical Model 1: Key Predictors for KM practices in India

The positive signs indicate the use of a predictor (KM Personnel, KM Metrics, etc.) results in easier adoption, implementation, or outcome of KM practices. The negative sign indicates the adoption of KM practices will result in the lower use of power-distance.



Theoretical Model 2: Key Predictors for KM practices in China



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(only a sample of the references has been provided to meet the 10 page requirement)

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