

DOCTORAL THESIS

Examining the impact of enterprise social media on chinese employee communication: affordance actualization, technology use, and relational outcomes

Ao, Song

Date of Award:
2020

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and intellectual property rights for the publications made accessible in HKBU Scholars are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners. In addition to the restrictions prescribed by the Copyright Ordinance of Hong Kong, all users and readers must also observe the following terms of use:

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from HKBU Scholars for the purpose of private study or research
- Users cannot further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- To share publications in HKBU Scholars with others, users are welcome to freely distribute the permanent URL assigned to the publication

ABSTRACT

The research adopts the technological affordance approach and the theory of planned behavior (TPB) to examine the role of enterprise social media (ESM) in employee communication and its effects on employees in the context of mainland China. The research postulated that organizations can actualize affordances of ESM to influence employees' cognitive perceptions of ESM (i.e., attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control) that further affect their ESM use intention and relationships with organizations (i.e., employee-organization relationships; EORs). Using a mixed-methods approach to examine Enterprise WeChat (EWeChat), the research interviewed 36 participants to explore organizational actions of EWeChat affordance actualization and employee perceptions about EWeChat use in mainland China. An online survey with 427 mainland Chinese employees adopting EWeChat was conducted to investigate the role of ESM affordance actualization in forming the employees' intention to continuously use EWeChat, as well as in cultivating their EORs through their attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and habits of EWeChat use. Key results of the research include the following. Thirteen EWeChat affordances and means of actualization (i.e., association, control, diversity, feedback, outeraction, perpetual contact, persistence, personalization, portability, privacy, social presence, synchronicity, and visibility) for specific organizational goals were identified. The influence of EWeChat affordance actualization on employees' intention to continuously use EWeChat was mediated by their

perceived benefits and risks of EWeChat use. The utilitarian benefit, hedonic benefit, avoidance of work-life conflicts, social concerns, privacy concerns, and perceived behavioral control were positive indicators of the continuous EWeChat-use intention, while performance risk was a negative indicator. The effects of affordance actualization on EORs were partially mediated by employees' perceived utilitarian benefit and perceived professional image related to EWeChat use. The research extends the TPB to predict ESM use in Chinese workplaces. It explicates ESM affordance actualization as the interaction between ESM and organization (actor 1), and also between ESM and employees (actor 2). It also evidences that ESM can be used as a relationship cultivation tool. The research sheds light on how organizations in mainland China can effectively configure their ESM to maximize the efficacy and relational outcomes of its mobile application in employee communication.

Keywords: *Organizational communication; Internal communication effectiveness; Enterprise social media; Affordance; Theory of planned behavior; Organization-Public relationships; Employee-Organization relationships; Social networking; Chinese employees*

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
LIST OF ABBREVIATION.....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Research Objectives.....	3
1.2 Theoretical Framework.....	7
1.3 Research Design	8
1.4 Significance of the Research.....	9
CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND.....	11
2.1 Enterprise Social Media (ESM).....	11
2.2 Studied Medium: EWeChat	14
2.3 Chinese Workplace	17
CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	22
3.1 ICTs and Employee Communication.....	22
3.2 Affordance Approach	26
3.2.1 Affordances of ESM	35
3.3 Affordance Actualization and Affordance Outcomes	51
3.4 Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB).....	53
3.4.1 Attitude.....	58
3.4.2 Subjective Norms	64
3.4.3 Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC).....	66
3.5 Affordance Actualization and TPB Constructs	68
3.6 Behavioral Intentions: Technology Adoption.....	70
3.7 TPB Constructs and Behavioral Intentions.....	73
3.8 Employee-organization Relationships (EORs).....	76
3.9 Attitude toward EWeChat Use and EORs	78
3.10 Conclusion	81
CHAPTER 4: STUDY 1	85
4.1 Methodology: In-Depth Interviews	85
4.1.1 Participants.....	85

4.1.2 Interview Protocol.....	91
4.1.3 Data Analysis Procedures	92
4.2 Results.....	104
4.2.1 EWeChat Use with Other Platforms	105
4.2.2 RQ1: Organizational Goals	117
4.2.3 RQ2: Affordance Actualization	142
4.2.4 RQ3: Perceived Benefits	172
4.2.5 RQ3: Perceived Risks	182
4.2.6 RQ3: Subjective Norms	193
4.2.7 RQ3: Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)	196
4.2.8 Organizational Features	198
4.2.9 Conclusion.....	200
CHAPTER 5: STUDY 2	203
5.1 Methodology: Survey	203
5.1.1 Survey Instrument	203
5.1.2 Sampling and Participants.....	223
5.1.3 Data Analysis	225
5.2 Results.....	229
5.2.1 RQ4: Effects of Organizational Affordance Actualization	229
5.2.2 H1 – H4 & RQ7: Effects of TPB Constructs on EWeChat Adoption Intention	250
5.2.3 H5 – H6 & RQ8: Effects of Perceived Benefits and Risks on EORs	255
5.2.4 RQ5: Mediation Effects of Affordance Actualization on Continuous EWeChat Use Intention via TPB Constructs	260
5.2.5 RQ6: Mediation Effects of Affordance Actualization on EORs via TPB Constructs.....	267
CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION	272
6.1 Key Findings of ESM Affordance Actualization and its Effects on TPB Constructs	272
6.2 Key Findings of TPB Constructs’ Effects on Continuous EWeChat Use Intention.....	275
6.3 Key Findings of TPB Constructs’ Effects on EORs.....	275
6.4 EWeChat Use Patterns.....	275

6.4.1 Salient Affordances Actualized by Mainland Chinese Organizations	276
6.4.2 The Role of WeChat in Employee Communication	278
6.4.3 ESM as a Mobile Platform	280
6.5 Goals of EWeChat Use	281
6.5.1 ESM as an Instrumental Tool.....	281
6.5.2 Social Concern and WLC.....	283
6.5.3 Effects of Human Voice.....	285
6.5.4 ESM as An EOR Cultivation Tool.....	286
6.6 Outcomes of EWeChat Use	288
6.6.1 Privacy Concern and Monitoring.....	288
6.6.2 The Mediation Effects of TPB Constructs	291
6.7 Theoretical Implications	292
6.7.1 Implications to the ESM and Affordance Literature.....	292
6.7.2 Implications to TPB and Employee Communication.....	297
6.7.3 Implications to the Public Relations' Body of Knowledge.....	301
6.8 Practical Implications	307
CHAPTER 7: LIMITATION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS	312
REFERENCES	317
APPENDICES	379
Appendix A. Interview Protocol (English and Simplified Chinese)	379
Appendix B. Survey Questionnaire (English and Simplified Chinese).....	392
CURRICULUM VITAE	420