Enterprise SNS Use and Profile Perceptions: A Comparison of Cultures

Abstract
The use of social networking sites in organizations continues to increase year over year. While much research has focused on the social tools and their benefits, there has been comparatively little research done on the impact these systems have on employees. The current research focuses on the use of social networking systems in the organization, and the perception formed by users of the profiles of others. This research also examines the cultural components of perceptions with these technologies. The research findings indicate that culture does have an impact on the formation of perceptions for social networking technologies.

Keywords
Social Networks, cultural differences, user engagement, user perception

Introduction
The use of social media continues to increase within the enterprise. A recent study suggests corporate investment in internal social media will reach $2.7 billion by 2017. A common organizational goal is to provide social media capabilities within an organizational environment as companies scramble to meet the increasing demands of many young employees (“digital natives” (Palfrey and Gasser 2010)) who see contemporary technologies such as social networking software as necessary for a productive work life (Bughin et al. 2008; Schooley et al. 2005). These technologies (e.g. social networking sites) have enabled employees to create a personal profile, form internal connections with fellow employees, and share knowledge.

The problems organizations often face with implementing a social media technology is understanding how users will interact with that technology. Research on enterprise social media tends to focus on describing tools/techniques and their benefits (c.f. Widen-Wulff and Totterman 2010) without examining the consequences these technologies may have for employees. Recent research has started to examine additional impacts of social media, such as the impact on the impression formation process (Cummings 2013). However, there tends to be a focus on benefits the technology affords, with minimal examinations into the impacts of bringing a consumer technology developed for one purpose (i.e. hedonic) into a dramatically different environment, the enterprise.

This paper examines Enterprise Social Networking Sites (SNS) and the potential of employees using them to form perceptions of other employees. We examine both the impact use factors (convenience, hedonic, utility) and how this influences trust in SNS profiles. Additionally, culture is examined to understand how a user’s culture can impact both use and trust. In the subsequent sections, we first examine SNS and use using the framework of Use and Gratification Theory. Research questions are then proposed around both use and culture followed by results and discussion.

Background and Research Questions
SNSs have been broadly defined as “a web-based service that allows individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (Boyd and Ellison 2007, p.211). Within the public domain, social network sites offer individuals an outlet to present themselves in a digital format, allowing them to provide details concerning
themselves and establish/maintain their network of relationships to fellow members (Ellison et al. 2007). The primary features of these sites include the ability to connect with others, share personal information, send/receive messages, provide “status” updates, post comments, and numerous other tools tailored by the user.

Uses of public sites range from connecting/maintaining contact with friends (e.g. Facebook) to more work-related sites used for connecting to companies and professionals (e.g. LinkedIn). Research on public SNS has examined topics such as individual use of sites including privacy / risk taking (Fogel and Nehmad 2009), site usage (Dwyer et al. 2008), communication (Wigand et al. 2010) and self-presentation (Donath 2008). The focus has tended to be on personal presentation of oneself and how specific components (e.g. friends) can potentially signal good (or bad) characteristics (Donath 2007).

Organizations are beginning to find the utility that social and interactive technologies bring through sharing of expertise and positively supporting employees. Topics in this domain have varied from general organizational usage (Mislove et al. 2007) to the establishment and maintenance of organizational relationships (Dwyer 2007). In general, research focuses on the ongoing use of a SNS including how users appropriate the technology in their interactions with known employees (DiMicco et al. 2009). The current paper examines how users appropriate the use of Enterprise SNS, as organizations are now bringing a technology created for hedonic purposes to the enterprise where use is for more utilitarian purposes.

**User Engagement with SNS**

Research has shown that system design is often driven by their ability to “gratify” an inherent need of the user. Uses and gratification (U&G) theory studies user’s socio-physical needs to understand what attracts a user to a specific media. The U&G paradigm states users will turn to and continue to use a specific technology based on the gratifications they obtain from that medium (Premkumar et al. 2008). U&G has been used extensively investigating user interactions with various media including messaging, electronic bulletin boards and virtual communities (Leung 2007). Prior research has attempted to classify systems as being either designed to fulfill utilitarian or hedonic purposes (Van der Heijden 2004).

The initial design of public SNSs was to provide a site which enables users to socially interact in a casual, enjoyable environment. Prior research suggest SNSs are categorized as a hedonic system, which aim to provide an enjoyable experience while filling a user’s emotional needs (Premkumar et al. 2008). The value of a hedonic system is correlated to the user experience when using the system. Users seek out a pleasurable, fun experience through hedonic systems which comes from the use of multiple sensory channels (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Designers of public SNS incorporated a number of features, such as images, tagging, wall posts, etc., to incorporate multiple sensory channels to encourage prolonged use of the site. Thus, these are considered hedonic systems because the design objective was to encourage prolonged use and provide enjoyment in a private environment (Van der Heijden 2004).

In contrast, utilitarian systems take a different approach in which users are engaging in a technology to provide some instrumental value. Utilitarian value to the user arises from the effectiveness and efficiencies gained through the use of the systems (Holbrook 1994). While research suggests an Enterprise SNS can take on both hedonic and utilitarian perspectives, the primary goal of implementing a social media package is to increase employee effectiveness in, for example, communication or knowledge sharing (DiMicco et al. 2009). Additionally, Van der Heijden (2004) suggests systems in the workplace tend to more utilitarian where perceived usefulness is more dominant. Therefore, Enterprise SNS would naturally elicit utilitarian motivation to engage with this technology in the workplace.

A problem now facing organizations is how users will engage in a hedonic system implemented in a utilitarian environment. One approach taken by some companies is the use of public sites such as LinkedIn within the organization (Skeels and Grudin 2009). However, this approach appears to be challenging in part for the reasons mentioned previously concerning hedonic and utilitarian systems (e.g. employees were not making a distinction between the use of these systems in the home and within the organization). A more common approach is to implement an Enterprise SNS. Large organizations (e.g. IBM) are already promoting the use of Enterprise SNSs, with employees actively engaging in the use of Enterprise SNS as way of staying connected to not only immediate colleagues, but employees they worked with previously (DiMicco and Millen 2008).
Many employees see Enterprise SNS as a tool of convenience, allowing them to stay in contact with previous work teams (Skeels and Grudin 2009) and more generally, a convenient way to maintain a social network of colleagues (i.e. contact management) (Richter and Riemer 2009). These sites now allow individuals to manage contacts beyond traditional software (e.g. Outlook), incorporating visual components (e.g. pictures of contacts), active engagement (e.g. status of contacts) and maintenance of fringe relationships (e.g. staying in contact with former team members) (Shih 2009). Thus, within an Enterprise SNS, there exists a third potential way a user may interact beyond hedonic and utilitarian which is convenience.

While research continues to examine the impact use has on adoption and prolonged use of systems (Kim et al. 2005; Van der Heijden 2004; Xu et al. 2012), there has been limited research examining the impact use has on the socio-emotional process (e.g. formation of perceptions). Specifically, we are concerned with understanding what impact use (i.e. convenience, utility, and hedonic) will have on perceptions of profile owners. Many companies have and continue to adopt virtual teams as a way to leverage differing backgrounds and knowledge areas (Hung et al. 2004). The challenge of working in a virtual environment is that individuals are often working with others they have no previous history with, and are often separated by both time and space (Jarvenpaa and Leidner 1999; Powell et al. 2004). While research has suggested new technologies such as Enterprise SNS may help alleviate the problem of separation and relationship development (Cummings et al. 2009), there is an additional aspect to be explored: engagement with technology and perception formation. In the subsequent sections, we examine not only the impacts of use on profile perceptions, but expand on use by incorporating the potential impact culture may have as well.

### Cultural Impacts on Perception Formation

The impact of culture on information systems development and use has become an increasingly important topic in IS research (Kappos and Rivard 2008). Previous research has shown that perceptions of websites, and different aspects of websites, can differ between cultures (Cyr and Head 2013; Cyr et al. 2010). Research has also found that culture will have an impact on the diffusion of technological innovation (Dwyer et al. 2005) and on the formation of online trust (Hwang and Lee 2012). Additionally, for online purchase behavior of consumers, culture will have an impact on the use of SNS (Pookulangara and Koesler 2011).

Cultural differences are measured along several different axes. Specifically, research into cultural differences looks at the cultural values espoused as masculine/feminine, individualism/collectivism, power/distance and uncertainty/avoidance. These differences have been shown to lead to differences in the adoption of technology (Dwyer et al. 2005; Srite and Karahanna 2006). Furthermore, these differences have been shown more broadly culturally. For example, it has also been shown that values differ between entire cultures (i.e. US and Asian cultures) (Cyr and Head 2013). Rather than measuring the cultural differences between the participants in the current study, the authors sought to measure the factors that impact trust and the willingness to share via a SNS in a work setting to explore the differences for the use factors, based on the cultural of the participants. This lead to our two research questions:

**RQ1** For those in the US culture, what is the impact of use type on profile trust and intention to share?

**RQ2** For those in an Asian culture, what is the impact of use type on profile trust and intention to share?

### Use and Profile Trust

To understand how use (i.e. convenience, hedonic, utilitarian) influences perceptions of others, we have chosen to examine trust. Trust is the social judgment made by individuals concerning their willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of others (Mayer, Davis et al. 1995; Robert, Denis et al. 2009). Trust can have significant impacts within organizations, with research finding numerous benefits including increased cooperation and collaboration in group settings (Jarvenpaa et al. 2004; Kramer 1999). Alternatively, in situations of minimal or no trust, team collaboration problems occur more often and can include poor decision-making, increased conflicts, and risks of misunderstandings, all leading to hampered performance (Hartman 1999; Haikkinen 2004). In traditional environments (i.e. face-to-face), trust formation occurs as individual’s make judgments of past behavior (Walther 1992; Kramer 1999). However, within a mediated environment, the development of trust becomes challenging as most
communication occurs across information and communication technologies (ICTs), with limited behaviors available to assess in developing trust.

Within virtual team research, trust is often examined through the trustor’s expectations that the trustee displays attributes showing that they can be relied upon (Kramer and Tyler 1996; Robert, Denis et al. 2009). The development of this trust occurs through two distinct paths, either imported swiftly at the start of a relationship, or over time, through personal experiences between the two parties (i.e. trustor and trustee) (Meyerson, Weick et al. 1996). Because the current study focuses on initial perceptions prior to interaction, “swift” trust is examined. This type of trust is imported from prior experiences used to invoke similarities to the current situation. Thus, initial trust is based on a process where a team member’s characteristics are used to quickly assess their level of trust (Meyerson, Weick et al. 1996; McKnight, Cummings et al. 1998; Robert, Denis et al. 2009).

Because we are examining trust of profile owners, trust disposition must also be accounted for within the model. Trust disposition often refers to an individual’s “generalized attitude” from personal experiences that shapes one’s predisposition to trust or distrust others (Gurtman 1992). Dispositional trust generally results from past experiences and may have an influence on individuals making trust judgments who have limited, relevant information about a team member’s past behavior. Because dispositional trust can impact perception, we have incorporated trust disposition as a moderator in our model to understand how this might influence the relationship between use and trust.

The final construct examined in the model is willingness to share knowledge. Previous research suggests that an individual’s intention to share information and knowledge in a team environment can be linked to the level of trust among team members (Jarvenpaa and Leidner 1999). Because the research is examining the impact of Enterprise SNS use on perceptions of profiles, intention to share has been included to examine if Enterprise SNSs have an impact on trust of profile information and to see if this trust increases the likelihood the trustor will share knowledge with the trustee. Figure 1 illustrates the research model used to examine research questions 1 and 2.

![Figure 1 – Research Model](image)

**Methodology**

An experimental design was used to examine perceptions of trust within Enterprise SNS across cultures. Vignettes were chosen to place all subjects in the same scenario. Vignettes “present subjects with written descriptions of realistic situations and then request responses on a number of rating scales that measure the dependent variables of interest” (Trevino 1992, pp. 127-8). The use of vignettes has gained recent popularity within IS and management research, especially as a technique to evaluate individual perceptions, beliefs and attitudes (Jarvenpaa and Staples 2000; Siponen and Vance 2010; Dennis, Robert et al. 2011). In particular, this method has been proven to effectively capture individual perceptions similar to those currently being assessed, such as trust (Amabile, Patterson et al. 2001; Nakayachi and Watabe 2005; Colquitt and Jackson 2006; Robert, Denis et al. 2009).
Participants read an initial vignette describing a situation in which they participate in a future project with others in a virtual team and were asked to imagine the virtual team will begin meeting shortly. Following the vignette, each participant was asked specific questions about demographics and their intent to use Enterprise SNS (i.e., convenience, hedonic or utilitarian). Participants were then introduced to an individual they have no knowledge of and have not interacted with previously. They then viewed a SNS profile of this individual. Participants were then asked a number of perception questions concerning their future team member.

**Measures**

Measures for the current study were adopted from previously developed scales and were adapted to fit the current context of Enterprise SNS. Each measure used a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 – Strongly Disagree to 7 – Strongly Agree. The convenience measure was developed using the qualitative results from employee interviews in Dwyer et al. (2008). For both hedonic and utilitarian measures, items developed by Kim et al. (2005) were adapted to refer to an Enterprise SNS. To test moderation effects, we used a 4-item scale for trust disposition that has been used in virtual environment research (Jarvenpaa et al. 1998; Robert et al. 2009). Trust was measured using scales created to measure trust in virtual teams (Jarvenpaa et al. 1998; McAllister 1995). Finally, because participants have not yet interacted with the profile owner, intention to share knowledge was measured by adapting a scale used to measure future interaction and sharing (Bock et al. 2005; Yang and Farn 2009).

**Participants**

Data was collected using an experimental lab setting at a large, state university with participants drawn from an undergraduate business course. 249 participants were used with participation in the experiment being voluntary (course credit was given for their participation). To analyze different cultures post-experiment, the participant pool was separated into US participants (approx. 160) and Asian participants (approx. 84). 5 participants did not provide their country of origin and were eliminated from the study. The average participant’s age was 20 years, with an average length of SNS usage of 6.5 years. 60% of participants were male.

**Analysis and Results**

SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle et al. 2005) was chosen to analyze the research model. To assess the measurement model, the approach outlined by Chin (1998) was used. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics, validity and reliability measures. Results indicate model reliability with construct composite reliability (CR) > .70 and model validity with an average variance explained (AVE) > .50. The results also indicate discriminant validity with the square root of the AVE (shaded on the cross diagonal in Table 1) for each factor greater than the corresponding correlations. Table 2 further indicates discriminant validity with factor loadings higher on their measured construct, compared to other factors.

### Table 1. Descriptive statistics, measurement validation and correlations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>Conv.</th>
<th>Utility</th>
<th>Hedonic</th>
<th>Trust Disp.</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Share</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Convenience</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian</td>
<td>5.09</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>4.74</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust Disp.</td>
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<td>1.01</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.78</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profile Trust</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to Share</td>
<td>5.58</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* The diagonals are the square roots of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each factor.
Table 2. Loadings and Cross Loadings of construct items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Convenience</th>
<th>Hedonic</th>
<th>Utility</th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>TrustDisp</th>
<th>Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Con1</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Con2</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>Con3</td>
<td>0.76</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
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<td>0.14</td>
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<td>Hedonic1</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.93</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.05</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hedonic2</td>
<td>0.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hedonic3</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.31</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hedonic5</td>
<td>0.32</td>
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<td>0.31</td>
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<td>0.06</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utility2</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Utility3</td>
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<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.88</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust1</td>
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<td>0.87</td>
<td>0.34</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust2</td>
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<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust3</td>
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<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.86</td>
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<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust4</td>
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<td>0.79</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trust5</td>
<td>0.20</td>
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<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.89</td>
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<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DISP1</td>
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<td>0.28</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>DISP2</td>
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<tr>
<td>DISP3</td>
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<td>0.28</td>
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<td>DISP4</td>
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<td>0.19</td>
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<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>RKSI2</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.25</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>RKSI3</td>
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<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Next, we examine the proposed model according to the research questions. To test for cultural moderation, we ran two separate models: one for US cultures and one for Asian cultures. The first model (Figure 1) analyzed RQ1 concerning US culture (only significant moderation of trust disposition is displayed). For US cultures, results suggest utilitarian use of Enterprise SNS to have a significant impact on perceptions of trust ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.01$). Furthermore, trust moderation negatively impacts the relationship from utilitarian use to profile trust ($\beta=-0.20, p <0.01$). Finally, the impact of trust on intention to share had a significant impact as well ($\beta=0.47, p <0.001$). The overall variances explained for Profile Trust and Willingness to share were 0.23 and 0.22 respectively.
Figure 2. Measurement Model Results – US Culture

RQ2 examines how Asian cultures engage in Enterprise SNS (see Figure 3). Results varied from RQ1 showing that hedonic use has a significant impact on profile trust ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). Similar to US cultures, trust disposition had a significant, but positive moderating effect on the relationship between hedonic use and Trust ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$). Lastly, the impact of trust on intention to share had a significant impact as well ($\beta = 0.55$, $p < 0.001$). The overall variances explained for Profile Trust and Willingness to share were 0.44 and 0.31 respectively.

Figure 3. Measurement Model Results – Asian Culture

Discussion

The goal of the current research is to begin to explore use factors and cultural impacts on perception formation in Enterprise SNSs. The results suggest use factors do indeed have an impact on the perception formation process. Furthermore, our research found clear differences between subjects from the US and those from Asia. These results are interesting, in that they suggest users from the two cultures studied had completely different approaches to developing profile trust in the SNS system in the enterprise...
setting. Utilitarian use appears to significantly influence profile trust in the US while hedonic has an even greater impact on profile trust for Asian cultures. For both cultures, we found trust disposition to significantly moderate the relationships, however in different directions. As expected, trust disposition positively influences the relationship between hedonic use and profile trust in the model representing Asian cultures. However, there was a negative influence on the relationship between utilitarian use and profile trust in the model representing US cultures. Further research is needed to understand the negative influence from trust disposition.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the model had greater explanatory power for those users from Asian cultures compared to the US. The profile trust variance explained in Asian culture was almost double that of US cultures. This means that not only does hedonic use significantly influence profile trust but this explains a significant amount of variance in profile trust. Furthermore, profile trust significantly impact willingness to share. These results show a need to more fully explore the role that culture plays in perception and use of information systems.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. One limitation is the use of students as subjects, rather than industry professionals. However, the authors feel that this is not a significant weakness, as these students will be entering the workforce shortly, and they have greater experience with social networking sites than many workers, so it was felt that their perceptions were relevant. Another limitation with regards to the sample was the cultural breakdown. The findings indicate differences between the cultures studied, however only two cultures were included. Future research should explore the differences between other cultures not included in our research, to determine what the impact of those cultural differences might be on the use of SNS technologies in the enterprise. In addition, this study did not measure the participants on the various dimensions used to distinguish between cultures. For future research, it would be interesting to examine these factors, to more finely measure which cultural differences have an impact on trust and willingness to share. Finally, this study only examined these differences in regards to SNS technologies in the enterprise. While it seems reasonable to assume that differences would exist between cultures with regard to other technologies, further research will be required to determine if these differences are steady, or vary based on culture and technology.

REFERENCES


