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Understanding passive knowledge sharing within an online business community from the perspectives of Expectancy Theory & Social Capital Theory

Kamarul Faizal Hashim

PhD Candidate, New Zealand, khashim@aut.ac.nz

Felix B. Tan

IS Professor, New Zealand, ftan@aut.ac.nz

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Dr. Felix B Tan
Professor of Information Systems
Head of School

First floor, Duthie Whyte Building
Corner Wakefield St and Mayoral Drive
Private Bag 92006
Auckland 1020, New Zealand
Telephone 64 9 9179487
Facsimile 64 9 9179944
email: felix.tan@aut.ac.nz

14 July, 2009

Professor Paulo Goes
Doctoral Consortium Co-Chair
PACIS2009

Dear Paulo

PACIS2009 Doctoral Consortium Nomination from Auckland University of Technology

I am writing to nominate my PhD student for the PACIS2009 Doctoral Consortium. Please find attached the submission along with this letter of nomination.

Details of the nominee include:

Title Understanding passive knowledge sharing within an online business community from the perspectives of Expectancy Theory & Social Capital Theory
Name Kamarul Faizal Hashim
Contact Address School of Business
Auckland University of Technology
Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1020, New Zealand
Tel: + 649 9219999 ext 8953
Email kfaizal.hashim@aut.ac.nz

My details follow:

Name Dr. Felix B Tan
Title Professor of Information Systems and Discipline Chair
Contact Address School of Business
Auckland University of Technology
Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1020, New Zealand
Tel: + 649 9219487 + Fax: + 649 9219876
Email felix.tan@aut.ac.nz

Thank you for the opportunity to be considered.

Best Regards



Felix B Tan

**PACIS 2009 Doctoral Consortium
Nomination Information Form**

Dissertation Title	Understanding passive knowledge sharing within an online business community from the perspectives of Expectancy Theory & Social Capital Theory
Candidate Information	
Name	Kamarul Faizal Hashim
Institution and Department	Business Information Systems AUT University, New Zealand
Email	khashim@aut.ac.nz
Phone	Tel: + 649 9219999 ext 8953 Mobile: +6421-0517856
Fax	+64 9 921 9944
Nominating Faculty Information	
Name	Professor Felix B Tan
Designation	Discipline Chair
Institution and Department	Business Information Systems AUT University, New Zealand
Email	felix.tan@aut.ac.nz
Phone	+ 649 9219487
Fax	+ 649 9219876

With this nomination, I, as the nominating faculty, certify that the candidate
KAMARUL FAIZAL HASIM is the sole nominee for PACIS 2009 Doctoral
Consortium from the AUT University.

UNDERSTANDING PASSIVE KNOWLEDGE SHARING WITHIN AN ONLINE BUSINESS COMMUNITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF EXPECTANCY THEORY & SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY

Kamarul Faizal Hashim
khashim@aut.ac.nz

Supervisor
Professor Felix B. Tan
ftan@aut.ac.nz

Department of Business Information System
Faculty of Business and Law
AUT University, New Zealand

LITERATURE RESEARCH

Knowledge is one of the most important resources in any organization. In this 21st century, knowledge is becoming a source of sustainable competitive advantage because organizations need continuous innovation due to rapid changes in products, technologies, competitors and even society (Nonaka, Toyama & Konno, 2000). Knowledge is also accepted as a firm-specific resource that is essential to create value for the firm (Nonaka, Toyama & Konno, 2000).

The growth of the Internet has increased employees' knowledge-sharing (KS) abilities within and between organizations. With the Internet, employees are connected and able to exchange knowledge and ideas virtually (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). The Internet enables employees to connect with large electronic knowledge resources (Sherif, Hoffman, & Thomas, 2006). These electronic databases allow employees to pool information as shared knowledge (Kankanhali, Tan & Wei, 2005). Through the shared resources employees can improve their work performance by employing ideas from co-workers (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002).

Sharing knowledge among community members requires group effort. To utilize pooled resources employees must demonstrate cooperative behavior (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2005). With cooperative behavior, employees can get many benefits from the shared knowledge. Among them are sharing experiences and expertise with others (Wasko & Faraj, 2005; Wenger & Snyder, 2000), fostering new approaches to solving problems (Wenger and Snyder 2000), encouraging innovation and learning within organizations (Wasko & Faraj, 2005), and constantly regenerating and recontextualizing current knowledge (Sharratt & Usoro 2003; Wasko & Faraj, 2000).

Despite all the benefits from sharing knowledge, cultivating cooperative behavior among group members has always been a challenge for organizations (Kollock, 1998). Uncooperative behaviors in group effort represent a social loafing (SL) problem (Kidwell & Robie, 2003). SL is defined as an individual tendency to reduce one's effort towards a group task which results in sub-optimal outcomes (Latane 1981). SL has been related to a number of negative organization group outcomes (Murphy et al. 2003) and also been labeled as a social disease (Latane, Williams & Harkins 1979). Among the negative outcomes are losses of group performance (Karau & Williams, 1993; Sheppard, 1993), poor decision making (Chidambaram & Tung, 2005) and a lack of knowledge contribution (Lin & Huang, 2008). KS is also affected by the SL problem (Bock & Sabherwal, 2008; Cress et al., 2005; Lin & Huang, 2008). Among the factors that contributes to SL behavior in KS is lack of evaluations

(contribution not rewarded) (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002; Cress, Kimmerle & Hesse, 2006) lack of self-efficacy (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2002) and lack of trust (Lin & Huang, 2008).

On the other hand, according to Cress et al. (2005), SL also occurs when knowledge is shared using electronic databases. The authors outline six characteristics that lead to SL in sharing knowledge using databases. Among them are feelings of unnecessary contribution, the group goal is not salient and feelings of anonymity. This is also supported by Blaskovich (2008) and Suleiman and Watson (2008) when they demonstrate through their experiments that SL behavior is induced when there is 'distance' between group members. Distance between members leads to a feeling of isolation and a presumption that their contributions are not necessary. Therefore a virtual setting may exacerbate the behavior of SL (Chidambaram & Tung, 2005). Although both experiments focused on a virtual collaboration task, there is a strong possibility that KS within online community can also be affected by SL behavior.

As a conclusion, from the literature it is clear that sharing knowledge through an online setting will have a double impact of the SL problem. Few studies have explored the effects of SL on KS and so far no studies have examined the SL effects within online KS activities. This is a clear indication that the effect of SL on KS activities especially within an online setting is under-researched. To date, there are only two studies using reward (Cress, Kimmerle, & Hesse, 2006) and trust (Lin & Huang, 2008) to examine the SL effects on KS. Therefore this study makes an important contribution to both the SL and KM literature.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

With the expansion of ICT, more organizations are focusing on the development of online business communities (OBC) to help facilitate better flow of knowledge between employees (Blaskovich 2008). Although ICT is said to be the most effective tools to support KS (Wasko & Faraj, 2000) it is not a guarantee that KS activities within and between organizations are going to be successful (Constant et al. 1994; Cross & Baird 2000). For this study, a consultancy company is chosen as a case study. It is because in consultancy companies, knowledge is the most important asset (Kautz & Mahnke, 2003). If the organization fails to disseminate the knowledge effectively, the capability of the company to be successful is in doubt. Since today's business environment is dynamic, having up to date and new edge knowledge is an advantage for a consultancy company to be competitive.

Encouraging employees to actively contribute to the OBC with up-to-date and ongoing knowledge is one of the biggest challenges in online KS (Chiu, Hsu & Wang, 2006). To understand what factors influence employees to withhold their effort from sharing knowledge within an OBC is crucial to the successful implementation of an online knowledge-sharing community. Understanding this question is important because today's organizations are spending a lot of money expecting that their company is going to be successfully sharing knowledge using ICT tools. If the implementation of KS using ICT is not as expected, it will be a waste of both financial and technology ability.

This research proposes to introduce a new construct from the perspective of SL effect on KM. Although SL issues have long been discussed in organizational behavior, psychology, sociology and economics, they have largely been ignored by IS researchers (Chidambaram & Tung, 2005). A new conceptualization of withholding effort is required because most previous research employed the same construct of SL used in the economics, sociology and psychology domains (Blaskovich, 2008). Hence, a new concept of SL is required to better

understand this effect on KS. Therefore this research proposes a new construct called passive knowledge sharing (PKS).

RESEARCH THEORETICAL BASIS

In this research, two theories will be integrated as the basis for identifying the factors that contribute to PKS. Integration of theory is used because PKS occurs both at individual and group levels (Szymanski, 1987). So to have a better understanding of PKS, this study will integrate both Expectancy Theory (ET) and Social Capital Theory (SCT). For this study, ET is used to explain PKS from the individual perspective while SCT will explain PKS from the group level perspective.

The reasons why ET and SCT have been chosen are as follows. Firstly, ET has been widely used in studying SL effects in psychology, managerial and economics domains. ET contends that individual expectancy can be increased if their motivation level is increased (Sheppard, 1993). Since, KS is also affected by individual motivation, so by increasing employee motivation, one can expect an increase in individual contributions which decreases PKS at an individual level. Secondly, SCT is known for its ability to mobilize resources through relationships. The literature has demonstrated that cooperation is positively related to strong relational dimensions such as trust, norms and group identity. Therefore increasing the relational, structural and cognitive dimension of a group will help to reduce PKS at the group level.

RESEARCH MODEL

The research model (Figure 1) predicts that PKS will affect employee's KS ability when their motivation levels are low and their relationships between group members are weak. In this study *reward, self-efficacy, trust, norms, group identity, network ties* and *shared norms* are the independent variables and *PKS* is the dependent variables. This study expects a negative relationship between variables due to the nature of SL which has negative affects on group performance.

At the individual level, this model predicts that when an employee's KS ability within the OBC is not evaluated they will withhold their effort and choose to free ride. To motivate them, each contribution should either be intrinsically or extrinsically rewarded (Sheppard, 1993). This reward can help employees balance the cost accumulated when sharing their knowledge. Since KS is voluntary, the expectation or beliefs (self-efficacy) that their knowledge is going to be helpful to others is also important to increase cooperative behavior (Cabrera and Cabrera, 2002). Therefore, both reward and self efficacy are important to explain the factors that influence employees' PKS behavior from the individual perspective.

At the group level, employees will share knowledge if they have a high trust level, reciprocity norm and high group identity between members. This high relational dimension is important to increase KS abilities. According to Lin and Huang (2008), trust can make employee's care about each other more and willing to cooperate rather being selfish. Besides that having reciprocity norms also helps people not to behave selfishly. Group identity has positive effects on cooperation by making collective interest become more salient (Brewer & Kramer, 1986). Finally network ties and shared goals are also predicted to reduce PKS. When network ties between employees are strong they will help each other and increase the cooperative

behavior which will also increase the level of contribution towards the OBC. Shared goals on the other hand will decrease PKS by increasing employee's commitment and responsibility (Cress et al., 2005).

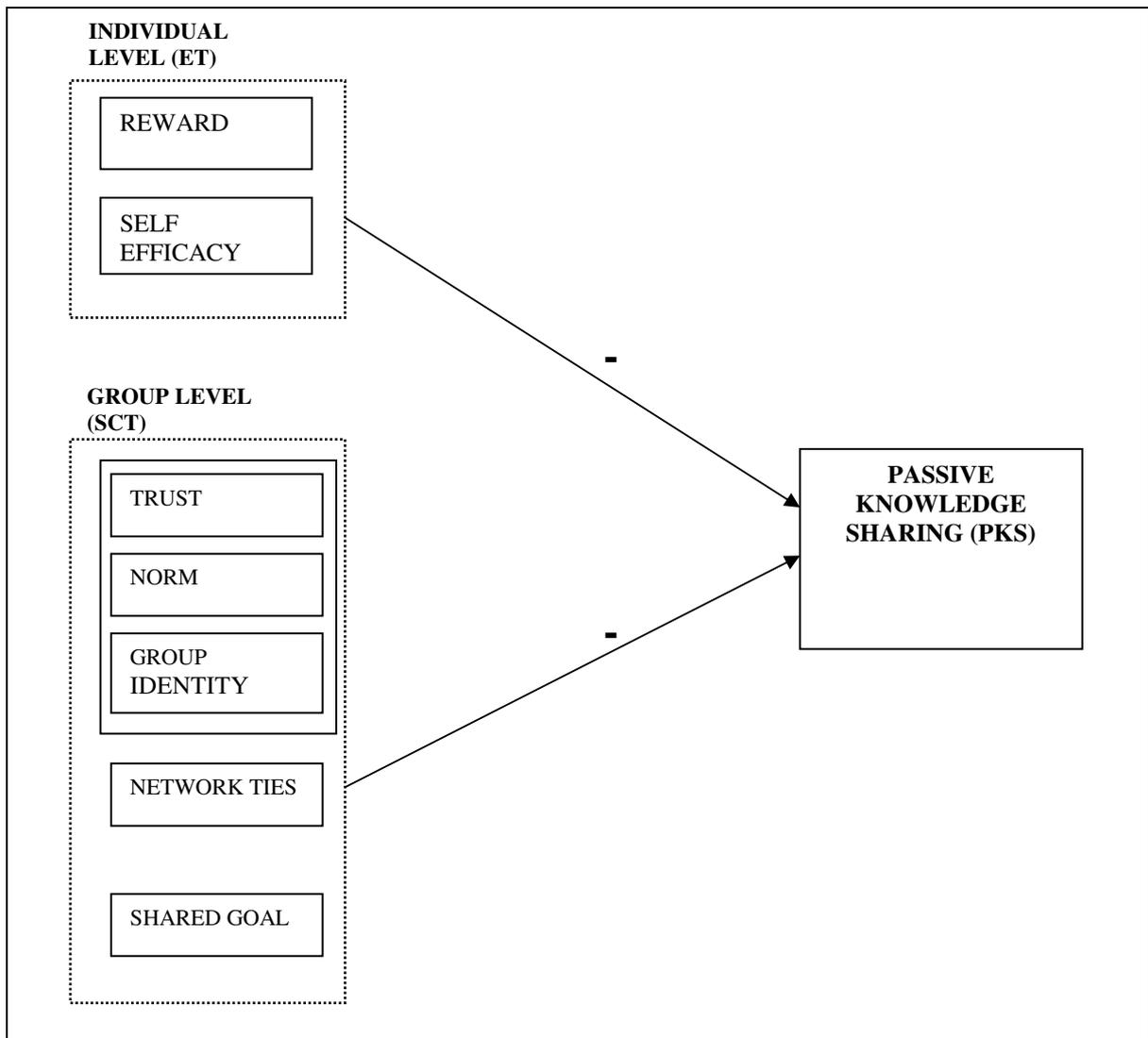


Figure 1: Proposed research model

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research will answer the following research questions:

1. How does passive knowledge sharing affect knowledge sharing activities within an online business community (OBC)?
2. What are the dimensions of Expectancy Theory (ET) that significantly affect PKS behaviour within an OBC?
3. What are the dimensions of Social Capital Theory (SCT) that significantly affect PKS behaviour within an OBC?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research proposes to use a case study method to examine the PKS effects within an OBC. This study proposes to use the SAP community network (SAPCN)(www.sdn.sap.com/irj/scn) as the case study. SAPCN is chosen because 1) the study by Fahey, Vasconcelos and Ellis (2007) explained that SAPCN is having problems increasing its level of participation; 2) SAP is one of the biggest consulting companies that uses ICT to facilitate its KS activities worldwide. By understanding the factors that influence PKS behavior, this study hopes to improve the level of KS within SAPCN.

SAPCN consists of 3 communities which are the SAP Developer Network (SDN) community, the SAP Business Process Expert (BPX) community and the SAP Business Objects (SBO) community. What is unique about SAPCN is that they combine an online forum, blog and wiki as their main channel of communications. All these channels support open communications and it is good to support community based KS activity (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). But this study is not going to examine PKS effects on all community and communication channels due to the time limitation the researcher has for the PhD program. So this study will focus on the PKS effects in the BPX community which only uses online forum and blog as channels of communication. For data collection purposes, this study proposes to use an online questionnaire to gather primary data and proposes to use content analysis methods on the posted threads to counter check for reliability of the collected data. For data analysis, this research will use Structured Equation Modeling (SEM) statistical techniques.

RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

Body of knowledge

This study will contribute towards the body of knowledge in the following ways:

1. This study will be the first attempt to study PKS effects within an online setting.
2. The introduction of the passive knowledge sharing (PKS) construct to better understand the effects of SL in the KM literature.
3. Extending the use of SCT in the SL domain.

Practical Contributions

This study is hoping to make practical contributions in the following ways:

1. To help organizations understand the factors that influence PKS when sharing knowledge within an OBC.
2. To suggest practical approaches to SAPCN to overcome PKS effects within their community.

REFERENCES

Available on request.