Weblogging: A study of social computing and its impact on organizations

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Abstract

This article reviews weblogs and their role as a social networking device for young people and its probable evolution to the organizational computing medium. The motivation of young webloggers, based on an analysis of 33 interviews, and the evaluation of the fit between technology features and the needs of these webloggers are reported. Four user types with their unique profiles and technology needs, and a needs–technology fit model, are described. The findings support the conjecture that organizational computing will (or should) take advantage of employees’ social computing expertise and acceptance and to further capture the attention of customers.

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1. Introduction

Social networking web sites — sites used for creating and maintaining social connections among individuals — have become an important medium for people to interact in the cyber world. According to Alexa (alexa.com, 16 January 2006), 15 out of the top 20 most popular web sites are either social networks per se or have embedded social networking functions. Currently, the most commonly used social networking technologies are discussion boards, real time chat, P2P newsgroups, and listservs [11]. Yet a comparably new Internet technology, weblogging is now driving the contagion of virtual communities, especially among young people. A recent survey from the Gallup Poll organization reported that 20% of the respondents participated in blogging activities and 28% of them were aged 18–29 (See detail at http://www.editorandpublisher.com/eandp/news/article_display.jsp?vnu_content_id=1001957922).

Weblog hosting sites such as Myspace and Xanga are among the most active sites on the Web. Alexa reported on average 16 million daily visits to Xanga, 28 million to Blogger and Blogspot (combined), 6 million to LiveJournal, and 6 million to TypePad, for January 2006. As another apparent indication of the technology’s popularity and impact, Yahoo recently announced the inclusion of weblog technology in its suite of applications [5].

While early weblogs may have been used largely by technology savvy users with an interest in journalistic reporting, weblogs nowadays are increasingly attracting young people who share their daily activities with their peers and keep up with existing relationships. Many blog users, for instance list their age in the teens (a random
sample of Xanga users had an average age of only 16, with 13 being the minimum age to enroll). This transition in the technology and its use may have significant implications. First, it may reshape social computing (social computing is defined as any type of computing application that serves as an intermediary or a focus for a social relation [17]), shifting importance away from traditional technologies such as e-mail. Second, developments in social computing may increasingly impact organizational computing (organizational computing is defined as any type of computing application that is used by organizations to achieve business goals), as organizations on the one hand need to find ways to address their customers through the weblogging medium, and on the other hand may wish to take advantage of bloggers’ social computing skills and the technology to improve organizational information processing and knowledge management.

We therefore seek to explore weblog use and its impact on social (and possibly organizational) computing within this article. Our arguments will be made as follows. The next section presents the background of weblogging. We then describe the popular weblog technology features that are commonly used by webloggers. In Section 4 we report on the study and its findings and in Section 5 discuss the impact of social computing on organizations. The paper concludes with implications and directions for future research.

2. Background on weblogging

The term weblog was first coined by John Barger in December 1997 [1]. Weblogs typically describe a personal diary, kept on the Web, which can be edited by an end-user with few web publication skills. Although weblogs have existed for only a few years, their principles, functionality and use have already significantly evolved. Du and Wagner [4], for instance, describe three generations. First generation weblogs were first-person diaries, with the focus of being a “log of the Web”, allowing webloggers to comment on other web-based articles. Their main virtue was to allow non-technical people to share text content via single-click web publishing. The user interface of these weblogs was normally quite basic. As weblogging popularity increased, so did the interest of webloggers to comment on each other’s articles. Hence, second generation weblogging software included more between weblog communication features, including the important “permalink” (permanent URL to each individual weblog entry). In addition to such social networking features, another second generation change was the improvement in user interface to enable more features that people were familiar with from the word processing environment, as well as multi-media components.

Third generation weblogs, which are currently emerging, bundle existing and new tools together to enhance productivity and to further enhance connectivity on the Web. Third generation weblogs are application blogs, which provide practical applications for the webloggers to use. For instance, in Lycos circles, users can set up “workflows” that automate processes such as organizing a party from sending out invitations to receiving confirmations to providing map directions to guests. These third generation weblogs seek to port an increasing number of activities from the physical world into the cyberworld and carry real-world relationships online.

3. Popular weblog technology features

To better understand the attractiveness of weblogging services, it is essential to know what technological features are provided. Features of three leading weblog services providers (Blogger, Xanga, and LiveJournal) were analyzed. All three were highly ranked by Alexa.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function category</th>
<th>Xanga feature</th>
<th>Blogger feature</th>
<th>LiveJournal feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community building</td>
<td>Bulletin</td>
<td>Commentary</td>
<td>Counter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual profiles</td>
<td>Language (multiple)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Latest updated blogs</td>
<td>Most recent visitors</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Permalink</td>
<td>Skin (called scheme)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Syndication (RSS feeds)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Subscriptions</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Metro, Blogrings</td>
<td>Chatterbox</td>
<td>Team blog</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Chatterbox</td>
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<td>Emails</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Instant messaging</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Eprops</td>
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<td>Journal writing</td>
<td>Archival</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Language (multiple)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Permalink</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content management</td>
<td>Protected blogs</td>
<td>Private blogs;</td>
<td>Ban</td>
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<tr>
<td>Security &amp; privacy</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
com (ranked 28, 46, and 130, respectively among Alexa’s Global Top 500 Web Sites, as of 16 January 2006). The results are summarized in Table 1, showing the features provided to members with free accounts. Paid members can use more features, but the majority of subscribers opt for the free services.

While some functions are self-explanatory, some special terms need explanation. "Bulletin" is a broadcasting feature for disseminating messages to community members. "Commentary" allows community members to add comments on other weblogs. Individual profiles aim at allowing other community members to know as much as a blogger wants them to know. "Eprops" are tokens given by other webloggers to show how good a weblog is. "Permalink" is a permanent URL to each individual weblog entry. "Skins" (LiveJournal terms it as "Scheme") are predefined templates for webloggers to design their websites. Syndication (RSS feeds) allows webloggers to be notified when their interested weblogs are updated. "Metro/Blorging/Community" are groups of webloggers in the same geographical region or with a shared interest to interact together, and can be formed by any criteria. "Forum" and "Chatterbox" allow for an unprecedented amount of interaction between weblogers and the visitors. Archival is downloadable archives. "Protected Blogs/Private Blogs/Ban" are blog sites that are only accessible by selected members.

Although all leading sites provide comparable features, users have different preferences. The most popular blogging service among interviewees in this study was Xanga, which, like Blogger and LiveJournal, incorporates second generation technology. Its features enable relationship building, such as the set-up of circles of friends or subscribers to exchange content, which can either be disclosed or remain invisible to "non-members". One of Xanga’s relationship models, the social "Metro", extends the concept to city-wide circles for major metropolitan areas. Xanga’s Metros have grown at a rapid pace since their inception in November 2004, with several such Metros now enrolling tens of thousands of members. Hong Kong’s Metro, the most popular in Xanga, now numbers over 212,000 (in a city of 7 million people), thus reflecting more than 6% of that city’s Internet user population.

Given the enormous popularity of weblogging and technology choices made by webloggers, this study sought to explore this social computing phenomenon in more detail. We were particularly interested in three questions: (1) What are webloggers’ behavior (usage) patterns? (2) What are the motives of using specific weblogging technology? and (3) How does weblogging technology support these motives? To answer these questions, an exploratory investigation was carried out.

4. Weblog user behaviors examined

4.1. Study overview

To better understand the attractiveness of weblogs for young users and to reveal some of their usage behaviors, we carried out an exploratory investigation. The study involved an analysis of data obtained from 33 individual interviewees in Hong Kong. All but two interviewees were young adults, aged from 20 to 22, and were university students from different universities in Hong Kong (a Chinese speaking city). All of them were weblog users (the weblog sites they were using included Xanga, MSNspace, sohappy.net, and BlogCN; however, around 85% of the interviewees were Xanga users) with different usage patterns. Each interview was conducted for around 30 min. An hour glass approach was adopted, beginning with easy questions, then moving on to more sensitive or personal issues, and concluding the interview again with comfortable questions, plus a “thank you” message and the request for a possible follow-up. Study participants were asked a variety of questions related to usage intensity (frequency of use and duration), perception of group belonging and sharing (interest in weblog as a sharing device, peer influence in usage behavior, feeling of group belonging), and technology features they used to use. The interviews consisted of structured questions as well as ad-hoc follow-up questions. To encourage the interviewees to freely express themselves, interviews were conducted in Chinese. As the interviews were conducted in Chinese, two transcribers translated the interview scripts into English. Reliability of the transcription was ensured as these two transcribers examined each other’s transcription and agreed on the final set of the transcripts.

4.2. Findings

Interview discussions revealed that it was meaningful to differentiate weblog users into different groups based on their usage intensity and this categorization revealed several other distinguishing characteristics. Based on usage intensity, we categorized the study participants into four types which we labeled as Habitual (enthusiastic), Active, Personal, and Blogging lurkers.

Habitual (enthusiastic) users were the highest intensity users, who apparently had formed a strong habit of visiting their weblogs or weblogs of their weblog group (subscriber list). They described
themselves as “have to” access the weblog sites several times a day, to write their own entries (active use), to see whether their weblogs had received any comments, or to check their friends’ postings (passive use). Habitual users reported spending many hours to post their own weblog entries or to comment on their friends’ postings. For habitual users, group aspects of weblogging were highly important. They were eager to share (no matter whether within their group of friends or with the general public) and had adopted the weblogging software due to some peer pressure. They strongly felt that they should also post to weblogs as their friends did. They also considered weblogging as one of the best ways to spend idle time. For this user group, technology features that promoted sociability were of great importance. For example, they would keep lists of friends (subscriptions) for continuous interaction, or would use syndication (RSS feeds) to inform others or remain informed of changes. For a summary of habitual user characteristics, see Table 2.

User quote: “I am really eager to know what my friends have left in the blogs. It is not difficult to see who had posted. The RSS feeds features help a lot. I can let them know what I am thinking, what I have done, and I know their activities, it’s very important to me.”

User quote: “There are a lot of things in blogs. Just look around, then you can get some useful information. I learn how to upload video-clip to my blogs. There are a lot of blogs providing useful technical advices. I then uploaded the orientation camp video to my blog. My mentees like it, and we talk a lot of it when we chat online or when we meet in the corridor.”

We labeled the second user type as active users. Although less intensive in their weblog use, this type of user would regularly visit their weblogs, once a day or once every 2 to 3 days, usually during leisure time. They would spend time reading their friends’ weblogs and post comments, or would post their own journals and permit their friends to access them. They would not post entries every day, but as often as they felt the need to share. Although not as intensive users as habitual webloggers, they were also eager to keep connected with their friends. Overall, their behaviors and attitudes seemed comparable to the most active users, although they seemed less “addicted”. They preferred similar technology features as the most intensive users. For a summary of active user characteristics, see Table 2.

User quote: “I will usually access Xanga to see what had been posted if I have time after school. Xanga is a good communication tool for me, in addition to ICQ and MSN, to keep contact with my friends, so, if I have time, I will go there every day. Even though my friends are in the US, they can still know my activities. We thus have common topics once they return Hong Kong.”

User quote: “I can know my friends’ up-to-dated information and thus know more about them. I can then care about my friends more. Sometimes, I will feel embarrassed when caring them in a face-to-face situation; writing can help to communicate easier.”

We labeled the third type of users in our study personal users. These users would keep weblogs as a truly personal diary, shared only partially with friends and rarely with the general public. Friends might be allowed to read some daily life information, but would not have access to personal secrets, such as proprietary knowledge, or negative comments about their friends. This user type showed little concern for peer group or sharing. Correspondingly, technology features of relevance for this group were those that enabled privacy as well as easy publishing, archival, and access. For a summary of personal user characteristics, see Table 2.

Table 2
Characteristics of different user types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of bloggers/characteristics</th>
<th>Habitual</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Personal</th>
<th>Blogging lurker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typical frequency of blog access</td>
<td>Several times a day</td>
<td>Once daily</td>
<td>Once daily</td>
<td>Not fixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typical duration of blog access</td>
<td>Hours per day</td>
<td>Around 1 hour per day</td>
<td>Depends on own needs</td>
<td>Not fixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in blog as a sharing device</td>
<td>High–active and passive</td>
<td>High–active and passive</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low–active, High–passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer influence</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group belonging</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Strong</td>
<td>Weak/None</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preferred tools</td>
<td>Community building, journal writing</td>
<td>Community building, journal writing</td>
<td>Journal writing, content management</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Table 3
Features used by different users

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Users</th>
<th>Technological needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Habitual (enthusiastic) | Content management tools  
                             Community building tools  
                             Time structuring  
                             Search by category  
                             Commentary          |
| Active           | Content management tools  
                             Community building tools  
                             Search by category  
                             Commentary          |
| Personal         | Content management tools  
                             Secured closed blog       |
| Blogging lurker  | Reading                                  |

User quote: “Xanga is very stable. Many of my friends use it. I mainly go to Xanga for diary(-writing) purposes. When I want somebody to know (read), I’ll set it public. When I don’t let them know (read), I’ll set it private. I won’t let them know my secrets.”

User quote: “I seldom read other people's blogs and seldom give comments on them. I write my own blogs and read others' comments on me. I may respond some, but I will not respond to some too open-ended questions.”

User quote: “I can express my feeling in Xanga. Only a few close friends read my blogs. Some of my friends like to write their diaries on their blogs and let everybody read, but, I won’t. I like to write my feelings. Sometimes, I will write something about my boyfriend, and let him read.”

The fourth type of users we encountered were blogging lurkers. These users kept a weblog but would rarely or never post to it. Oftentimes, these users had little interest to share their own stories, but were eager to learn about their friends’, and thus had to maintain a weblog just to be able to subscribe to others’ weblogs. Overall, this was a less involved type of user, with less defined usage intensity or group belonging and correspondingly less distinct technology feature needs. For a summary of blogging lurker characteristics, see Table 2.

User quote: “Just want to know what my friends said. It's quite amusing to read their stories... No way to let them know mine.”

User quote: “... I have not posted after registration. It is not necessary and suitable for me. I won't write diary and I have no time... I only visit target users' blogs. Because they are my close friends, I won't read anything about other people.”

Different sets of tools and features are popular among different types of bloggers (Table 3 provides the summary). For example, community building features, including chatterbox, counters, and eprops, are frequently used by habitual and active bloggers, while protected blogrings, restricted subscription are the most desirable features for personal users. Understanding the fit between the features and the needs of particular types of weblog users could more precisely enable us to predict the growth of this social computing application and its potential evolution into becoming an organizational computing technology.

5. Discussion

Our findings indicate that use patterns and technology feature choices of different users are driven by users’ individual or social needs. Users carried out activities (such as commenting) using social technology to satisfy their individual and social needs. This behavior model showed significant similarity to organization computing where employees carry out tasks using technology, to achieve
organizational goals. Consequently, we formulate here an emergent model of needs–technology fit based on Goodhue’s and Thompson’s [7] model of task–technology fit.

5.1. Emergent model of needs–technology fit

Task–technology fit (TTF) is defined as the degree to which a technology assists an individual in performing his or her portfolio of tasks [7, p. 216], as depicted in Fig. 1. Several researchers have studied this phenomenon. For instance, Zigurs and Buckland [25], Dennis et al. [3], and Maruping and Agarwal [14] investigated the task–technology fit issue at work group level, while Goodhue and Thompson [7], and Lim and Benbasat [12] studied the fit between business tasks and the technology through evaluating the individual performance. While all these studies investigated technologies adopted by organizations, our study considers the fit in the social realm. To do so, we modified the TTF model. Task, itself, is not sufficient to reflect our research context. The tasks measured in previous studies (such as Goodhue et al. [6,7] and Zigurs et al. [25]) are all business related tasks, which are assigned by the individual workers’ superiors or the management level. However, in blog-based virtual communities, tasks performed are driven by individuals’ needs and desires. For example, habitual and active users need to build a close relationship within their group and then desire some specific technologies to help them to get closer to their friends. This is also important for an organization because it has to know their customers’ technological preferences to get closer to them with the most appropriate technologies. For personal users, organizations may have to provide abundant publishing tools to encourage comments postings. To serve customers better, organizations have to know their customers’ needs, thus we modified the TTF model by replacing the task with individual needs in our needs–technology fit research model (Fig. 2).

As implied by the model, we believe that the success of weblogging software as a social technology is directly related to the fit of its technology features with the needs of its users (Table 4 outlines the fit between needs and technological features). Other social technologies might be equivalent in their communication and information storing capabilities (such as email or discussion forum), but may lack the features to satisfy the needs to our interviewees, who, in return become very active users of the technology. The major social needs of the habitual and active weblog users (in our study) were to have large and active social circles, to be socially accepted, and to maintain social exchange with their peers. Weblogging technologies allow their weblogs to be accessed freely by other users, therefore, their goals for sociality can be achieved.

5.2. Impact on organizational computing

Having observed several unique usage patterns of weblogs as a social technology, the question arises what the impact of weblogs will be on organizational computing. We explore the issue along two dimensions,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of bloggers</th>
<th>Needs</th>
<th>Technological features fitting the needs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Habitual (enthusiastic)</td>
<td>Community building</td>
<td>Community building tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content management</td>
<td>Content management tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time structuring</td>
<td>Search engine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commentary provision/alert tools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
<td>Community building</td>
<td>Community building tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content management</td>
<td>Content management tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Search engine</td>
<td>Commentary provision/alert tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Commentary management tools</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Content management</td>
<td>Content management tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Privacy seeking</td>
<td>Secured closed blogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogging lurker</td>
<td>Information seeking</td>
<td>Reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 2. Needs–technology fit model.
namely the use of weblogs by employees, and the organizational use of weblogs to interact with customers (or possibly other external stakeholders).

5.2.1. Impact on the internal organizational environment

In general, social computing technologies have not yet received widespread use in organizations. In many companies, social computing is anathema to management, and social computing technologies are intentionally blocked through technological means such as port filters in the case of instant messaging [10,15], or via company policies (e.g., web-based e-mail) [18,20].

Successful organizational computing technology has largely been developed by well established software providers, and been adopted by employees either on a voluntary or mandatory basis. Yet this approach has resulted in a number of management issues. New technology adoption has required significant training cost and time, and corresponding costs. Furthermore, user resistance has to be overcome, if the technology does not fit with company culture. This has especially been an issue in knowledge management, where a combination of user reluctance to share and difficult-to-use technologies have held back efforts to successfully propagate knowledge around the organization [cf. 21,22].

In this environment, opportunities for employee weblogs abound. Employees who already apply weblogs in their social environment are “culturally” adapted to their use in organizations, and require little or no training to use a technology they are already familiar with. Furthermore, recognizing and exploiting the different user roles: “storer” (personal user), “linker” (active and habitual users), and lurker, organizations have the building blocks for knowledge sharing communities. To take advantage of this natural role adoption, the organization will have to proceed gently, allowing personal weblogging behaviors to be transitioned into the organization, as long as they are consistent with organizational policies. For example, “free speech” should be encouraged as long as employees do not disclose confidential or proprietary information they should not. Not surprisingly, in the nascent area of corporate weblogging, we see corporate policies emerging that are written with this tenor, encouraging employees to share openly, but responsibly (see for instance Yahoo’s guidelines for employee webloggers at http://jeremy.zawodny.com/yahoo/yahoo-blog-guidelines.pdf).

Weblogs, however, are only one example of social computing technologies that can impact organization practice. IBM for instance has policies for employee podcasting (presumably recognizing the value of this technology), while other companies have been quick to adopt VoIP calling, especially Skype. Sutherland [19] for instance quotes that Skype has already achieved considerable adoption in the workplace. Meanwhile, a number of “open-minded” companies have adopted instant messaging for internal communication between employees as well as external communication between business partners, with good results [9,16,23].

5.2.2. Impact on customer relationships

In their need to gain customer attention, companies may be able to reap the opportunity offered by weblogs. When email became popular as an interpersonal communication medium, companies, for better or worse, chose to broadcast their advertising messages through email [8]. However, as the sample of interviewed (young) webloggers demonstrates, this generation of technology users increasingly shuns email as a communication medium in favor of weblogs (or the associated communication media, such as pingbacks). Email is seen as a medium for formal communication [cf. 23], while personal conversations occur in and between weblogs.

Hence, for companies to regain the attention of webloggers, they likely have to adapt themselves. On one hand, they have to recognize that active and habitual weblog users spend much of their communications-focused time using weblogs, leaving little time for email. On the other hand, webloggers are also a reflection of a new type of Internet user who is interested in more personal and “natural” communication than has been company practice. According to the Cluetrain Manifesto [13], “markets are conversations” and people, whether as employees or as customers, are increasingly unwilling to listen to the artificial sounding language of marketing. Theses 53 and 56 of the Cluetrain Manifesto for instance state: “There are two conversations going on — one inside the company, and one with the market. These two conversations want to talk to each other. They are speaking the same language”.

Correspondingly the challenge for marketing departments will be to adopt the weblog medium (technology) and mode (voice), to interact with the most intensive weblog users, but also to at least change the mode of communication for customers becoming used to the “voice of the Web”. It is not surprising then that the Wall Street Journal predicts blogs (as well as other online innovations) to revolutionize the way organizations conduct their businesses in marketing [24].

6. Conclusions

Our study points out the importance of understanding social computing, which is believed to be the trend of
the future organizational computing. A better understanding of popular technologies, is beneficial for both academics and practitioners to better prepare for the future. We believe social computing, such as weblogging, will have a turnaround impact on organizational computing based on the analysis of the current situation.

6.1. Theoretical implications

This study is the starting point for investigating the fit between social computing technology and social user needs, plus the impact of social computing behaviors on organizational practice. As organizations increasingly appear to balance the social needs of hi-tech and knowledge workers with company requirements for product development and task completion, extending the view of task–technology fit as a driver of IT usage appears to be highly relevant and necessary. After all, if employees are encouraged by their employers to write their personal weblogs on company time (e.g., Plaxo, see http://www.corporateblogging.info/2005/06/policies-compared-todays-corporate.asp), the separation between task completion and social activity becomes blurred, and technology adoption and use may not simply be driven by traditional notions of task–technology fit. Similarly, understanding the role of social computing “amateurs” as innovators and early adopters inside the company, or as drivers of change in their role as customers requires attention. With the previous relative scarcity of information and communication technology and the corresponding know-how, much of the innovative activity was driven by professionals in research labs or in corporate environments. Yet this era has passed, allowing innovations to be driven by “amateurs”. Brown and Duguid [2], for instance, describe six dimensions (“6-D effect”) of information technology that lead to significant restructuring of society and social institutions. However, we yet have to develop appropriate theories to understand and explain the new interrelationships between professional task oriented and social computing, as well as the larger issue of “societal computing”.

6.2. Implications for practice

The practical impact for organizations that understand social computing should be vast. First, internally, the value proposition of social computing is compelling. While adoption of new technologies traditionally requires the alignment of numerous critical success factors, such as executive sponsorship, project management, sufficient resources, training, and organizational buy-in, successful social computing technologies have proven their value without these, usually based on intrinsic attractiveness, simplicity, and low cost. Hence, their organizational adoption becomes much easier and can take advantage of users’ own investment in self-training outside the workplace. Second, organizations must understand social computing technologies as a medium that draws significant customer attention. Either they need to compete for attention with this medium, or are able to use the medium as a communications channel to better reach customers. Particularly organizations that understand how to use the medium as a channel to reach customers should be able to reap extraordinary benefits.

6.3. Future research

In order to study the phenomenon in detail, much work needs to be done, beyond this exploratory study. More users will need to be surveyed so as to obtain more detailed, well-tested findings. Such an inquiry will need to consider the impact of other variables, such as age or gender, factors ignored in this study. Next, conjectures made about the impact on organizational computing will need to be tested, for instance through interviews with employee bloggers. Furthermore, a much needed extension will be a broadening of scope to include at least one more social technology so as to determine common patterns, and their potential impact on organizational computing.

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References


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